Library of Princeton
JUN 19 1891
Theological Seminary

PR4231
Division
Section .G75
No. V.1

ROBERT BROWNING

A.W. Elson & Co. Boston.

Robert Browning.

1889.

From a portrait by Robert Barrett Browning.

LIFE AND LETTERS

OF

ROBERT BROWNING

BY

MRS. SUTHERLAND ORR

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1891

The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.
Electrotyped and Printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.

PREFACE.

Such letters of Mr. Browning's as appear, whole or in part, in the present volumes have been in most cases given to me by the persons to whom they were addressed, or copied by Miss Browning from the originals under her care; but I owe to the daughter of the Rev. W. J. Fox — Mrs. Bridell-Fox — those written to her father and to Miss Flower, the two interesting extracts from her father's correspondence with herself, and Mr. Browning's note to Mr. Robertson.

For my general material I have been largely indebted to Miss Browning. Her memory was the only existing record of her

brother's boyhood and youth. It has been to me an unfailing as well as always accessible authority for that subsequent period of his life which I could only know in disconnected facts or his own fragmentary reminiscences. It is less true, indeed, to say that she has greatly helped me in writing this short biography than that without her help it could never have been undertaken.

I thank my friends Mrs. R. Courtenay Bell and Miss Hickey for their invaluable assistance in preparing the book for and carrying it through the press; and I acknowledge with real gratitude the advantages derived by it from Mr. Dykes Campbell's large literary experience in his very careful final revision of the proofs.

A. ORR.

April 22, 1891.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

Origin of the Browning Family. — Robert Browning's Grandfather. — His Position and Character. — His first and second Marriage. — Unkindness towards his eldest Son, Robert Browning's Father. — Alleged Infusion of West Indian Blood through Robert Browning's Grandmother. — Existing Evidence against it. — The Grandmother's Portrait 1

CHAPTER II.

Robert Browning's Father. — His Position in Life. — Comparison between him and his Son. — Tenderness towards his Son. — Outline of his Habits and Character. — His Death. — Significant Newspaper Paragraph. — Letter of Mr. Locker-Lampson. — Robert Browning's Mother. — Her Character and Antecedents. — Their Influence upon her Son. — Nervous Delicacy imparted to both her Children. — Its special Evidences in her Son 13

CHAPTER III.

1812–1826.

Birth of Robert Browning. — His Childhood and School-days. — Restless Temperament. — Brilliant Mental Endowments. — Incidental Peculiarities. — Strong Religious Feeling. — Passionate Attachment to his Mother ; Grief at first Separation. — Fondness for Animals. — Experiences of School Life. — Extensive Reading. — Early Attempts in Verse. — Letter from his Father concerning them. — Spurious Poems in Circulation. — "Incondita." — Mr. Fox. — Miss Flower 32

CHAPTER IV.

1826–1833.

First Impressions of Keats and Shelley. — Prolonged Influence of Shelley. — Details of Home Education. — Its Effects. — Youthful Restlessness. — Counteracting Love of Home. — Early Friendships : Alfred Domett, Joseph Arnould, the Silverthornes. — Choice of Poetry as a Profession. — Alternative Suggestions; mistaken Rumors concerning them. — Interest in Art. — Love of good Theatrical Performances. — Talent for Acting. — Final Preparation for Literary Life . 55

CHAPTER V.

1833–1835.

"Pauline." — Letters to Mr. Fox. — Publication of the Poem ; chief Biographical and Literary Characteris-

tics. — Mr. Fox's Review in the "Monthly Repository;" other Notices. — Russian Journey. — Desired diplomatic Appointment. — Minor Poems; first Sonnet; their Mode of Appearance. — "The Trifler." — M. de Ripert-Monclar. — "Paracelsus." — Letters to Mr. Fox concerning it; its Publication. — Incidental Origin of "Paracelsus;" its inspiring Motive; its Relation to "Pauline." — Mr. Fox's Review of it in the "Monthly Repository." — Article in the "Examiner" by John Forster 76

CHAPTER VI.

1835–1838.

Removal to Hatcham; some Particulars. — Renewed Intercourse with the second Family of Robert Browning's Grandfather. — Reuben Browning. — William Shergold Browning. — Visitors at Hatcham. — Thomas Carlyle. — Social Life. — New Friends and Acquaintance. — Introduction to Macready. — New Year's Eve at Elm Place. — Introduction to John Forster. — Miss Fanny Haworth. — Miss Martineau. — Serjeant Talfourd. — The "Ion" Supper. — "Strafford." — Relations with Macready. — Performance of "Strafford." — Letters concerning it from Mr. Browning and Miss Flower. — Personal Glimpses of Robert Browning. — Rival Forms of Dramatic Inspiration. — Relation of "Strafford" to "Sordello." — Mr. Robertson and the "Westminster Review" 111

CHAPTER VII.

1838–1841.

First Italian Journey. — Letters to Miss Haworth. — Mr. John Kenyon. — "Sordello." — Letter to Miss Flower. — "Pippa Passes." — "Bells and Pomegranates" 137

CHAPTER VIII.

1841–1844.

"A Blot in the 'Scutcheon." — Letters to Mr. Frank Hill; Lady Martin. — Charles Dickens. — Other Dramas and Minor Poems. — Letters to Miss Lee; Miss Haworth; Miss Flower. — Second Italian Journey; Naples. — E. J. Trelawney. — Stendhal . 168

CHAPTER IX.

1844–1849.

Introduction to Miss Barrett. — Engagement. — Motives for Secrecy. — Marriage. — Journey to Italy. — Extract of Letter from Mr. Fox. — Mrs. Browning's Letters to Miss Mitford. — Life at Pisa. — Vallombrosa. — Florence; Mr. Powers; Miss Boyle. — Proposed British Mission to the Vatican. — Father Prout. — Palazzo Guidi. — Fano; Ancona. — "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" at Sadler's Wells 201

CHAPTER X.

1849–1852.

Death of Mr. Browning's Mother. — Birth of his Son. — Mrs. Browning's Letters continued. — Baths of Lucca. — Florence again. — Venice. — Margaret Fuller Ossoli. — Visit to England. — Winter in Paris. — Carlyle. — George Sand. — Alfred de Musset . . 233

CHAPTER XI.

1852–1855.

M. Joseph Milsand. — His close Friendship with Mr. Browning; Mrs. Browning's Impression of him. — New Edition of Mr. Browning's Poems. — "Christmas Eve and Easter Day." — "Essay" on Shelley. — Summer in London. — Dante Gabriel Rossetti. — Florence; secluded Life. — Letters from Mr. and Mrs. Browning. — "Colombe's Birthday." — Baths of Lucca. — Mrs. Browning's Letters. — Winter in Rome. — Mr. and Mrs. Story. — Mrs. Sartoris. — Mrs. Fanny Kemble. — Summer in London. — Tennyson. — Ruskin 260

CHAPTER XII.

1855–1858.

"Men and Women." — "Karshook." — "Two in the Campagna." — Winter in Paris; Lady Elgin. — "Aurora Leigh." — Death of Mr. Kenyon and Mr.

Barrett. — Penini. — Mrs. Browning's Letters to Miss Browning. — The Florentine Carnival. — Baths of Lucca. — Spiritualism. — Mr. Kirkup; Count Ginnasi. — Letter from Mr. Browning to Mr. Fox. — Hâvre 295

LIFE AND LETTERS

OF

ROBERT BROWNING.

CHAPTER I.

Origin of the Browning Family. — Robert Browning's Grandfather. — His Position and Character. — His first and second Marriage. — Unkindness towards his eldest Son, Robert Browning's Father. — Alleged Infusion of West Indian Blood through Robert Browning's Grandmother. — Existing Evidence against it. — The Grandmother's Portrait.

A BELIEF was current in Mr. Browning's lifetime that he had Jewish blood in his veins. It received outward support from certain accidents of his life, from his known interest in the Hebrew language and literature, from his friendship for various members of the Jewish community in London. It might well have yielded to the fact of his never claiming the kinship, which could not have existed without

his knowledge, and which, if he had known it, he would, by reason of these very sympathies, have been the last person to disavow. The results of more recent and more systematic inquiry have shown the belief to be unfounded.

Our poet sprang, on the father's side, from an obscure or, as family tradition asserts, a decayed branch, of an Anglo-Saxon stock settled, at an early period of our history, in the south, and probably also southwest, of England. A line of Brownings owned the manors of Melbury-Sampford and Melbury-Osmond, in northwest Dorsetshire; their last representative disappeared — or was believed to do so — in the time of Henry VII., their manors passing into the hands of the Earls of Ilchester, who still hold them.[1] The name occurs after 1542 in different parts of the country: in two cases with the affix of "esquire," in two also, though not in both coincidently,

[1] I am indebted for these facts, as well as for some others referring to, or supplied by, Mr. Browning's uncles, to some notes made for the Browning Society by Dr. Furnivall.

within twenty miles of Pentridge, where the first distinct traces of the poet's family appear. Its cradle, as he called it, was Woodyates, in the parish of Pentridge, on the Wiltshire confines of Dorsetshire; and there his ancestors, of the third and fourth generations, held, as we understand, a modest but independent social position.

This fragment of history, if we may so call it, accords better with our impression of Mr. Browning's genius than could any pedigree which more palpably connected him with the "knightly" and "squirely" families whose name he bore. It supplies the strong roots of English national life to which we instinctively refer it. Both the vivid originality of that genius and its healthy assimilative power stamp it as, in some sense, the product of virgin soil; and although the varied elements which entered into its growth were racial as well as cultural, and inherited as well as absorbed, the evidence of its strong natural or physical basis remains undisturbed.

Mr. Browning, for his own part, maintained

a neutral attitude in the matter. He neither claimed nor disclaimed the more remote genealogical past which had presented itself as a certainty to some older members of his family. He preserved the old framed coat-of-arms handed down to him from his grandfather; and used, without misgiving as to his right to do so, a signet-ring engraved from it, the gift of a favorite uncle, in years gone by. But, so long as he was young, he had no reason to think about his ancestors; and, when he was old, he had no reason to care about them; he knew himself to be, in every possible case, the most important fact in his family history.

Roi ne suis, ni Prince aussi,
Suis le seigneur de Conti,

he wrote, a few years back, to a friend who had incidentally questioned him about it.

Our immediate knowledge of the family begins with Mr. Browning's grandfather, also a Robert Browning, who obtained through Lord Shaftesbury's influence a clerkship in the Bank of England, and entered on it when barely twenty, in 1769. He served fifty years, and

rose to the position of Principal of the Bank Stock Office, then an important one, and which brought him into contact with the leading financiers of the day. He became also a lieutenant in the Honorable Artillery Company, and took part in the defense of the Bank in the Gordon Riots of 1789. He was an able, energetic, and worldly man: an Englishman, very much of the provincial type; his literary tastes being limited to the Bible and "Tom Jones," both of which he is said to have read through once a year. He possessed a handsome person and, probably, a vigorous constitution, since he lived to the age of eighty-four, though frequently tormented by gout; a circumstance which may help to account for his not having seen much of his grandchildren, the poet and his sister; we are indeed told that he particularly dreaded the lively boy's vicinity to his afflicted foot. He married, in 1778, Margaret, daughter of a Mr. Tittle by his marriage with Miss Seymour; and who was born in the West Indies and had inherited property there. They had

three children: Robert, the poet's father; a daughter, who lived an uneventful life and plays no part in the family history; and another son who died an infant. The Creole mother died also when her eldest boy was only seven years old, and passed out of his memory in all but an indistinct impression of having seen her lying in her coffin. Five years later the widower married a Miss Smith, who gave him a large family.

This second marriage of Mr. Browning's was a critical event in the life of his eldest son; it gave him, to all appearance, two step-parents instead of one. There could have been little sympathy between his father and himself, for no two persons were ever more unlike, but there was yet another cause for the systematic unkindness under which the lad grew up. Mr. Browning fell, as a hard man easily does, greatly under the influence of his second wife, and this influence was made by her to subserve the interests of a more than natural jealousy of her predecessor. An early instance of this was her ban-

ishing the dead lady's portrait to a garret, on the plea that her husband did not need two wives. The son could be no burden upon her because he had a little income, derived from his mother's brother; but this, probably, only heightened her ill-will towards him. When he was old enough to go to a university, and very desirous of going — when, moreover, he offered to do so at his own cost — she induced his father to forbid it, because, she urged, they could not afford to send their other sons to college. An earlier ambition of his had been to become an artist; but when he showed his first completed picture to his father, the latter turned away and refused to look at it. He gave himself the finishing stroke in the parental eyes, by throwing up a lucrative employment which he had held for a short time on his mother's West Indian property, in disgust at the system of slave labor which was still in force there; and he paid for this unpractical conduct as soon as he was of age, by the compulsory reimbursement of all the expenses which his father, up to that

date, had incurred for him; and by the loss of his mother's fortune, which, at the time of her marriage, had not been settled upon her. It was probably in despair of doing anything better, that, soon after this, in his twenty-second year, he also became a clerk in the Bank of England. He married and settled in Camberwell, in 1811; his son and daughter were born, respectively, in 1812 and 1814. He became a widower in 1849; and when, four years later, he had completed his term of service at the Bank, he went with his daughter to Paris, where they resided until his death in 1866.

Dr. Furnivall has originated a theory, and maintains it as a conviction, that Mr. Browning's grandmother was more than a Creole in the strict sense of the term, that of a person born of white parents in the West Indies, and that an unmistakable dash of dark blood passed from her to her son and grandson. Such an occurrence was, on the face of it, not impossible, and would be absolutely unimportant to my mind, and, I think I may add,

to that of Mr. Browning's sister and son. The poet and his father were what we know them, and if negro blood had any part in their composition, it was no worse for them, and so much the better for the negro. But many persons among us are very averse to the idea of such a cross; I believe its assertion, in the present case, to be entirely mistaken; I prefer, therefore, touching on the facts alleged in favor of it, to passing them over in a silence which might be taken to mean indifference, but might also be interpreted into assent.

We are told that Mr. Browning was so dark in early life, that a nephew who saw him in Paris, in 1837, mistook him for an Italian. He neither had nor could have had a nephew; and he was not out of England at the time specified. It is said that when Mr. Browning senior was residing on his mother's sugar plantation at St. Kitt's, his appearance was held to justify his being placed in church among the colored members of the congregation. We are assured in the strongest terms that the story has no foundation, and this

by a gentleman whose authority in all matters concerning the Browning family Dr. Furnivall has otherwise accepted as conclusive. If the anecdote were true it would be a singular circumstance that Mr. Browning senior was always fond of drawing negro heads, and thus obviously disclaimed any unpleasant association with them.

I do not know the exact physical indications by which a dark strain is perceived; but if they are to be sought in the coloring of eyes, hair, and skin, they have been conspicuously absent in the two persons who in the present case are supposed to have borne them. The poet's father had light blue eyes and, I am assured by those who knew him best, a clear, ruddy complexion. His appearance induced strangers passing him in the Paris streets to remark, "C'est un Anglais!" The absolute whiteness of Miss Browning's skin was modified in her brother by a sallow tinge sufficiently explained by frequent disturbance of the liver; but it never affected the clearness of his large blue-gray eyes; and his hair,

which grew dark as he approached manhood, though it never became black, is spoken of, by every one who remembers him in childhood and youth, as golden. It is no less worthy of note that the daughter of his early friend Mr. Fox, who grew up in the little social circle to which he belonged, never even heard of the dark cross now imputed to him; and a lady who made his acquaintance during his twenty-fourth year wrote a sonnet upon him, beginning with these words: —

> Thy brow is calm, young Poet — pale and clear
> As a moonlighted statue.

The suggestion of Italian characteristics in the poet's face may serve, however, to introduce a curious fact, which can have no bearing on the main lines of his descent, but holds collateral possibilities concerning it. His mother's name Wiedemann or Wiedeman appears in a merely contracted form as that of one of the oldest families naturalized in Venice. It became united by marriage with the Rezzonico; and, by a strange coincidence, the last of these who occupied the palace now owned by Mr. Barrett Browning was a Wid-

man-Rezzonico. The present Contessa Widman has lately restored her own palace, which was falling into ruin.

That portrait of the first Mrs. Browning, which gave so much umbrage to her husband's second wife, has hung for many years in her grandson's dining-room, and is well known to all his friends. It represents a stately woman with an unmistakably fair skin; and if the face or hair betrays any indication of possible dark blood, it is imperceptible to the general observer, and must be of too slight and fugitive a nature to enter into the discussion. A long curl touches one shoulder. One hand rests upon a copy of Thomson's "Seasons," which was held to be the proper study and recreation of cultivated women in those days. The picture was painted by Wright of Derby.

A brother of this lady was an adventurous traveler, and was said to have penetrated farther into the interior of Africa than any other European of his time. His violent death will be found recorded in a singular experience of the poet's middle life.

CHAPTER II.

Robert Browning's Father. — His Position in Life. — Comparison between him and his Son. — Tenderness towards his Son. — Outline of his Habits and Character. — His Death. — Significant newspaper Paragraph. — Letter of Mr. Locker-Lampson. — Robert Browning's Mother. — Her Character and Antecedents. — Their Influence upon her Son. — Nervous Delicacy imparted to both her Children. — Its special Evidences in her Son.

It was almost a matter of course that Robert Browning's father should be disinclined for bank work. We are told, and can easily imagine, that he was not so good an official as the grandfather; we know that he did not rise so high, nor draw so large a salary. But he made the best of his position for his family's sake, and it was at that time both more important and more lucrative than such appointments have since become. Its emoluments could be increased by many honorable means not covered by the regular salary. The working-day was short, and every additional

hour's service well paid. To be enrolled on the night-watch was also very remunerative; there were enormous perquisites in pens, paper, and sealing-wax.[1] Mr. Browning availed himself of these opportunities of adding to his income, and was thus enabled, with the help of his private means, to gratify his scholarly and artistic tastes, and give his children the benefit of a very liberal education — the one distinct ideal of success in life which such a nature as his could form. Constituted as he was, he probably suffered very little through the paternal unkindness which had forced him into an uncongenial career. Its only palpable result was to make him a more anxiously indulgent parent when his own time came.

Many circumstances conspired to secure to the coming poet a happier childhood and youth than his father had had. His path was

[1] I have been told that, far from becoming careless in the use of these things from his practically unbounded command of them, he developed for them an almost superstitious reverence. He could never endure to see a scrap of writing-paper wasted.

to be smoothed not only by natural affection and conscientious care, but by literary and artistic sympathy. The second Mr. Browning differed, in certain respects, as much from the third as from the first. There were, nevertheless, strong points in which, if he did not resemble, he at least distinctly foreshadowed him; and the genius of the one would lack some possible explanation if we did not recognize in great measure its organized material in the other. Much, indeed, that was genius in the son existed as talent in the father. The moral nature of the younger man diverged from that of the older, though retaining strong points of similarity; but the mental equipments of the two differed far less in themselves than in the different uses to which temperament and circumstances trained them.

The most salient intellectual characteristic of Mr. Browning senior was his passion for reading. In his daughter's words, "he read in season, and out of season;" and he not only read, but remembered. As a schoolboy,

he knew by heart the first book of the Iliad, and all the odes of Horace; and it shows how deeply the classical part of his training must have entered into him, that he was wont, in later life, to soothe his little boy to sleep by humming to him an ode of Anacreon. It was one of his amusements at school to organize Homeric combats among the boys, in which the fighting was carried on in the manner of the Greeks and Trojans, and he and his friend Kenyon would arm themselves with swords and shields, and hack at each other lustily, exciting themselves to battle by insulting speeches derived from the Homeric text.[1]

Mr. Browning had also an extraordinary power of versifying, and taught his son from babyhood the words he wished him to remember, by joining them to a grotesque rhyme; the child learned all his Latin declensions in this way. His love of art had been

[1] This anecdote is partly quoted from Mrs. Andrew Crosse, who has introduced it into her article "John Kenyon and his Friends," *Temple Bar*, April, 1890. She herself received it from Mr. Dykes Campbell.

proved by his desire to adopt it as a profession; his talent for it was evidenced by the life and power of the sketches, often caricatures, which fell from his pen or pencil as easily as written words. Mr. Barrett Browning remembers gaining a very early elementary knowledge of anatomy from comic illustrated rhymes (now in the possession of their old friend, Mrs. Fraser Corkran) through which his grandfather impressed upon him the names and position of the principal bones of the human body.

Even more remarkable than his delight in reading was the manner in which Mr. Browning read. He carried into it all the preciseness of the scholar. It was his habit when he bought a book — which was generally an old one allowing of this addition — to have some pages of blank paper bound into it. These he filled with notes, chronological tables, or such other supplementary matter as would enhance the interest, or assist the mastering, of its contents; all written in a clear and firm though by no means formal handwriting.

More than one book thus treated by him has passed through my hands, leaving in me, it need hardly be said, a stronger impression of the owner's intellectual quality than the acquisition by him of the finest library could have conveyed. One of the experiences which disgusted him with St. Kitt's was the frustration by its authorities of an attempt he was making to teach a negro boy to read, and the understanding that all such educative action was prohibited.

In his faculties and attainments, as in his pleasures and appreciations, he showed the simplicity and genuineness of a child. He was not only ready to amuse, he could always identify himself with children, his love for whom never failed him in even his latest years. His more than childlike indifference to pecuniary advantages had been shown in early life. He gave another proof of it after his wife's death, when he declined a proposal, made to him by the Bank of England, to assist in founding one of its branch establishments in Liverpool. He never indeed, person-

ally, cared for money, except as a means of acquiring old, *i. e.* rare books, for which he had, as an acquaintance declared, the scent of a hound and the snap of a bulldog. His eagerness to possess such treasures was only matched by the generosity with which he parted with them; and his daughter well remembers the feeling of angry suspicion with which she and her brother noted the periodical arrival of a certain visitor who would be closeted with their father for hours, and steal away before the supper time, when the family would meet, with some precious parcel of books or prints under his arm.

It is almost superfluous to say that he was indifferent to creature comforts. Miss Browning was convinced that, if on any occasion she had said to him, "There will be no dinner today," he would only have looked up from his book to reply, "All right, my dear, it is of no consequence." In his bank-clerk days, when he sometimes dined in town, he left one restaurant with which he was not otherwise dissatisfied, because the waiter always gave him

the trouble of specifying what he would have to eat. A hundred times that trouble would not have deterred him from a kindly act. Of his goodness of heart, indeed, many distinct instances might be given; but even this scanty outline of his life has rendered them superfluous.

Mr. Browning enjoyed splendid physical health. His early love of reading had not precluded a wholesome enjoyment of athletic sports; and he was, as a boy, the fastest runner and best base-ball player in his school. He died, like his father, at eighty-four (or rather, within a few days of eighty-five), but, unlike him, he had never been ill; a French friend exclaimed when all was over, "Il n'a jamais été vieux." His faculties were so unclouded up to the last moment that he could watch himself dying, and speculate on the nature of the change which was befalling him. "What do you think death is, Robert?" he said to his son; "is it a fainting, or is it a pang?" A notice of his decease appeared in an American newspaper. It was written by

an unknown hand, and bears a stamp of genuineness which renders the greater part of it worth quoting.

"He was not only a ruddy, active man, with fine hair, that retained its strength and brownness to the last, but he had a courageous spirit and a remarkably intelligent mind. He was a man of the finest culture, and was often, and never vainly, consulted by his son Robert concerning the more recondite facts relating to the old characters, whose bones that poet liked so well to disturb. His knowledge of old French, Spanish, and Italian literature was wonderful. The old man went smiling and peaceful to his long rest, preserving his faculties to the last, insomuch that the physician, astonished at his continued calmness and good humor, turned to his daughter, and said in a low voice, 'Does this gentleman know that he is dying?' The daughter said in a voice which the father could hear, 'He knows it;' and the old man said with a quiet smile, 'Death is no enemy in my eyes.' His last words were spoken to his son Robert, who

was fanning him, 'I fear I am wearying you, dear.'"

Four years later one of his English acquaintances in Paris, Mr. Frederick Locker, now Mr. Locker-Lampson, wrote to Robert Browning as follows: —

December 26, 1870.

My dear Browning, — I have always thought that you or Miss Browning, or some other capable person, should draw up a sketch of your excellent father so that, hereafter, it might be known what an interesting man he was.

I used often to meet you in Paris, at Lady Elgin's. She had a genuine taste for poetry, and she liked being read to, and I remember you gave her a copy of Keats' poems, and you used often to read his poetry to her. Lady Elgin died in 1860, and I think it was in that year that Lady Charlotte and I[1] saw the most of Mr. Browning. He was then quite an elderly man, if years could make him so, but he

[1] Mr. Locker was then married to Lady Charlotte Bruce, Lady Elgin's daughter.

had so much vivacity of manner, and such simplicity and freshness of mind, that it was difficult to think him old.

I remember, he and your sister lived in an apartment in the Rue de Grenelle, St. Germain, in quite a simple fashion, much in the way that most people live in Paris, and in the way that all sensible people would wish to live all over the world.

Your father and I had at least one taste and affection in common. He liked hunting the old bookstalls on the *quais*, and he had a great love and admiration for Hogarth; and he possessed several of Hogarth's engravings, some in rare and early states of the plate; and he would relate with glee the circumstances under which he had picked them up, and at so small a price too! However, he had none of the *petit-maître* weakness of the ordinary collector, which is so common, and which I own to! — such as an infatuation for tall copies, and wide margins.

I remember your father was fond of drawing in a rough and ready fashion; he had

plenty of talent, I should think not very great cultivation; but quite enough to serve his purpose, and to amuse his friends. He had a thoroughly lively and *healthy* interest in your poetry, and he showed me some of your boyish attempts at versification.

Taking your dear father altogether, I quite believe him to have been one of those men — interesting men — whom the world never hears of. Perhaps he was shy — at any rate he was much less known than he ought to have been; and now, perhaps, he only remains in the recollection of his family, and of one or two superior people (like myself!) who were capable of appreciating him. My dear Browning, I really hope you will draw up a slight sketch of your father before it is too late. Yours,

FREDERICK LOCKER.

The judgments thus expressed twenty years ago are cordially re-stated in the letter in which Mr. Locker-Lampson authorizes me to publish them. The desired memoir was never

written; but the few details which I have given of the older Mr. Browning's life and character may perhaps stand for it.

With regard to the "strict dissent" with which her parents have been taxed, Miss Browning writes to me: "My father was born and educated in the Church of England, and, for many years before his death, lived in her communion. He became a Dissenter in middle life, and my mother, born and brought up in the Kirk of Scotland, became one also; but they could not be called bigoted, since we always in the evening attended the preaching of the Rev. Henry Melvill[1] (afterwards Canon of St. Paul's), whose sermons Robert much admired."[2]

Little need be said about the poet's mother. She was spoken of by Carlyle as "the true type of a Scottish gentlewoman." Mr. Ken-

[1] At Camden Chapel, Camberwell.

[2] Mr. Browning was much interested, in later years, in hearing Canon, perhaps then already Archdeacon, Farrar extol his eloquence and ask whether he had known him. Mr. Ruskin also spoke of him with admiration.

yon declared that such as she had no need to go to heaven, because they made it wherever they were. But her character was all resumed in her son's words, spoken with the tremulous emotion which so often accompanied his allusion to those he had loved and lost: "She was a divine woman." She was Scotch on the maternal side, and her kindly, gentle, but distinctly evangelical Christianity must have been derived from that source. Her father, William Wiedemann, a shipowner, was a Hamburg German settled in Dundee, and has been described by Mr. Browning as an accomplished draughtsman and musician. She herself had nothing of the artist about her, though we hear of her sometimes playing the piano; in all her goodness and sweetness she seems to have been somewhat matter-of-fact. But there is abundant indirect evidence of Mr. Browning's love of music having come to him through her, and we are certainly justified in holding the Scottish-German descent as accountable, in great measure at least, for the metaphysical quality so early apparent in

the poet's mind, and of which we find no evidence in that of his father. His strong religious instincts must have been derived from both parents, though most anxiously fostered by his mother.

There is yet another point on which Mrs. Browning must have influenced the life and destinies of her son, that of physical health, or, at least, nervous constitution. She was a delicate woman, very anæmic during her later years, and a martyr to neuralgia, which was perhaps a symptom of this condition. The acute ailment reproduced itself in her daughter in spite of an otherwise vigorous constitution. With the brother, the inheritance of suffering was not less surely present, if more difficult to trace. We have been accustomed to speaking of him as a brilliantly healthy man; he was healthy, even strong, in many essential respects. Until past the age of seventy he could take long walks without fatigue, and endure an amount of social and general physical strain which would have tried many younger men. He carried on until the last a

large, if not always serious, correspondence, and only within the latest months, perhaps weeks of his life, did his letters even suggest that physical brain-power was failing him. He had, within the limits which his death has assigned to it, a considerable recuperative power. His consciousness of health was vivid, so long as he was well; and it was only towards the end that the faith in his probable length of days occasionally deserted him. But he died of no acute disease, more than seven years younger than his father, having long carried with him external marks of age from which his father remained exempt. Till towards the age of forty he suffered from attacks of sore-throat, not frequent, but of an angry kind. He was constantly troubled by imperfect action of the liver, though no doctor pronounced the evil serious. I have spoken of this in reference to his complexion. During the last twenty years, if not for longer, he rarely spent a winter without a suffocating cold and cough; within the last five, asthmatic symptoms established themselves; and when

he sank under what was perhaps his first real attack of bronchitis, it was not because the attack was very severe, but because the heart was exhausted. The circumstances of his death recalled that of his mother; and we might carry the sad analogy still farther in his increasing pallor, and the slow and not strong pulse which always characterized him. This would perhaps be a mistake. It is difficult to reconcile any idea of bloodlessness with the bounding vitality of his younger body and mind. Any symptom of organic disease could scarcely, in his case, have been overlooked. But so much is certain: he was conscious of what he called a nervousness of nature which neither father nor grandfather could have bequeathed to him. He imputed to this, or, in other words, to an undue physical sensitiveness to mental causes of irritation, his proneness to deranged liver, and the asthmatic conditions which he believed, rightly or wrongly, to be produced by it. He was perhaps mistaken in some of his inferences, but he was not mistaken in the fact. He had the

pleasures as well as the pains of this nervous temperament; its quick response to every congenial stimulus of physical atmosphere, and human contact. It heightened the enjoyment, perhaps exaggerated the consciousness of his physical powers. It also certainly in his later years led him to overdraw them. Many persons have believed that he could not live without society; a prolonged seclusion from it would, for obvious reasons, have been unsuited to him. But the excited gayety which to the last he carried into every social gathering was often primarily the result of a moral and physical effort which his temperament prompted, but his strength could not always justify. Nature avenged herself in recurrent periods of exhaustion, long before the closing stage had set in.

I shall subsequently have occasion to trace this nervous impressibility through various aspects and relations of his life; all I now seek to show is that this healthiest of poets and most real of men was not compounded of elements of pure health, and perhaps never

could have been so. It might sound grotesque to say that only a delicate woman could have been the mother of Robert Browning. The fact remains that of such a one, and no other, he was born; and we may imagine, without being fanciful, that his father's placid intellectual powers required for their transmutation into poetic genius just this infusion of a vital element not only charged with other racial and individual qualities, but physically and morally more nearly allied to pain. Perhaps, even for his happiness as a man, we could not have wished it otherwise.

CHAPTER III.

1812–1826.

Birth of Robert Browning. — His Childhood and Schooldays. — Restless Temperament. — Brilliant Mental Endowments. — Incidental Peculiarities. — Strong Religious Feeling. — Passionate Attachment to his Mother ; Grief at first Separation. — Fondness for Animals. — Experiences of School Life. — Extensive Reading. — Early Attempts in Verse. — Letter from his Father concerning them. — Spurious Poems in Circulation. — "Incondita." — Mr. Fox. — Miss Flower.

Robert Browning was born, as has been often repeated, at Camberwell, on May 7, 1812, soon after a great comet had disappeared from the sky. He was a handsome, vigorous, fearless child, and soon developed an unresting activity and a fiery temper. He clamored for occupation from the moment he could speak. His mother could only keep him quiet when once he had emerged from infancy by telling him stories — doubtless

Bible stories — while holding him on her knee. His energies were of course destructive till they had found their proper outlet; but we do not hear of his ever having destroyed anything for the mere sake of doing so. His first recorded piece of mischief was putting a handsome Brussels lace veil of his mother's into the fire; but the motive, which he was just old enough to lisp out, was also his excuse: "A pitty baze [pretty blaze], mamma." Imagination soon came to his rescue. It has often been told how he extemporized verse aloud while walking round and round the dining-room table, supporting himself by his hands, when he was still so small that his head was scarcely above it. He remembered having entertained his mother in the very first walk he was considered old enough to take with her, by a fantastic account of his possessions in houses, etc., of which the topographical details elicited from her the remark, "Why, sir, you are quite a geographer." And though this kind of romancing is common enough among intelligent children, it

distinguishes itself in this case by the strong impression which the incident had left on his own mind. It seems to have been a first real flight of dramatic fancy, confusing his identity for the time being.

The power of inventing did not, however, interfere with his readiness to learn, and the facility with which he acquired whatever knowledge came in his way had, on one occasion, inconvenient results. A lady of reduced fortunes kept a small elementary school for boys, a stone's-throw from his home; and he was sent to it as a day boarder at so tender an age that his parents, it is supposed, had no object in view but to get rid of his turbulent activity for an hour or two every morning and afternoon. Nevertheless, his proficiency in reading and spelling was soon so much ahead of that of the biggest boy, that complaints broke out among the mammas, who were sure there was not fair play. Mrs. —— was neglecting her other pupils for the sake of "bringing on Master Browning;" and the poor lady found it necessary to discourage

Master Browning's attendance lest she should lose the remainder of her flock. This, at least, was the story as he himself remembered it. According to Miss Browning his instructress did not yield without a parting shot. She retorted on the discontented parents that, if she could give their children "Master Browning's intellect," she would have no difficulty in satisfying them. After this came the interlude of home-teaching, in which all his elementary knowledge must have been gained. As an older child he was placed with two Misses Ready, who prepared boys for entering their brother's (the Rev. Thomas Ready's) school; and in due time he passed into the latter, where he remained up to the age of fourteen.

He seems in those early days to have had few playmates beyond his sister, two years younger than himself, and whom his irrepressible spirit must sometimes have frightened or repelled. Nor do we hear anything of childish loves; and though an entry appeared in his diary one Sunday in about the seventh or

eighth year of his age, "married two wives this morning," it only referred to a vague imaginary appropriation of two girls whom he had just seen in church, and whose charm probably lay in their being much bigger than he. He was, however, capable of a self-conscious shyness in the presence of even a little girl; and his sense of certain proprieties was extraordinarily keen. He told a friend that on one occasion, when the merest child, he had edged his way by the wall from one point of his bedroom to another, because he was not fully clothed, and his reflection in the glass could otherwise have been seen through the partly open door.[1]

[1] Another anecdote, of a very different kind, belongs to an earlier period, and to that category of pure naughtiness which could not fail to be sometimes represented in the conduct of so gifted a child. An old lady who visited his mother, and was characterized in the family as "Aunt Betsy," had irritated him by pronouncing the word "lovers" with the contemptuous jerk which the typical old maid is sometimes apt to impart to it, when once the question had arisen why a certain "Lovers' Walk" was so called. He was too nearly a baby to imagine what a "lover" was; he supposed the name denoted a trade or occupation. But his human

His imaginative emotions were largely absorbed by religion. The early Biblical training had had its effect, and he was, to use his own words, "passionately religious" in those nursery years; but during them and many succeeding ones, his mother filled his heart. He loved her so much, he has been heard to say, that even as a grown man he could not sit by her otherwise than with an arm round her waist. It is difficult to measure the influence which this feeling may have exercised on his later life; it led, even now, to a strange and touching little incident which had in it the incipient poet no less than the loving

sympathy resented Aunt Betsy's manner as an affront; and he determined, after probably repeated provocation, to show her something worse than a "lover," whatever this might be. So one night he slipped out of bed, exchanged his night-gown for what he considered the appropriate undress of a devil, completed this by a paper tail, and the ugliest face he could make, and rushed into the drawing-room, where the old lady and his mother were drinking tea. He was snatched up and carried away before he had had time to judge of the effect of his apparition; but he did not think, looking back upon the circumstances in later life, that Aunt Betsy had deserved quite so ill of her fellow-creatures as he then believed.

child. His attendance at Miss Ready's school only kept him from home from Monday till Saturday of every week; but when called upon to confront his first five days of banishment, he felt sure that he would not survive them. A leaden cistern belonging to the school had in, or outside it, the raised image of a face. He chose the cistern for his place of burial, and converted the face into his epitaph by passing his hand over and over it to a continuous chant of: "In memory of unhappy Browning," — the ceremony being renewed in his spare moments, till the acute stage of the feeling had passed away.

The fondness for animals for which through life he was noted was conspicuous in his very earliest days. His urgent demand for "something to do" would constantly include "something to be caught" for him: "they were to catch him an eft;" "they were to catch him a frog." He would refuse to take his medicine unless bribed by the gift of a speckled frog from among the strawberries; and the maternal parasol, hovering above the straw-

berry bed during the search for this object of his desires, remained a standing picture in his remembrance. But the love of the uncommon was already asserting itself; and one of his very juvenile projects was a collection of rare creatures, the first contribution to which was a couple of lady-birds, picked up one winter's day on a wall and immediately consigned to a box lined with cotton-wool, and labeled, "Animals found surviving in the depths of a severe winter." Nor did curiosity in this case weaken the power of sympathy. His passion for birds and beasts was the counterpart of his father's love of children, only displaying itself before the age at which child-love naturally appears. His mother used to read Croxall's Fables to his little sister and him. The story contained in them of a lion who was kicked to death by an ass affected him so painfully that he could no longer endure the sight of the book; and as he dared not destroy it, he buried it between the stuffing and the woodwork of an old dining-room chair, where it stood for lost, at all events for the time being. When first he

heard the adventures of the parrot who insisted on leaving his cage, and who enjoyed himself for a little while and then died of hunger and cold, he — and his sister with him — cried so bitterly that it was found necessary to invent a different ending, according to which the parrot was rescued just in time, and brought back to his cage to live peacefully in it ever after.

As a boy, he kept owls and monkeys, magpies and hedgehogs, an eagle, and even a couple of large snakes, constantly bringing home the more portable creatures in his pockets, and transferring them to his mother for immediate care. I have heard him speak admiringly of the skillful tenderness with which she took into her lap a lacerated cat, washed and sewed up its ghastly wound, and nursed it back to health. The great intimacy with the life and habits of animals which reveals itself in his works is readily explained by these facts.

Mr. Ready's establishment was chosen for him as the best in the neighborhood; and

both there and under the preparatory training of that gentleman's sisters, the young Robert was well and kindly cared for. The Misses Ready especially concerned themselves with the spiritual welfare of their pupils. The periodical hair-brushings were accompanied by the singing, and fell naturally into the measure, of Watts's hymns; and Mr. Browning has given his friends some very hearty laughs by illustrating with voice and gesture the ferocious emphasis with which the brush would swoop down in the accentuated syllables of the following lines: —

> Lord, 't is a pleasant thing to stand
> In gardens planted by Thy hand.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Fools never raise their thoughts so high,
> Like *brutes* they live, like BRUTES they die.

He even compelled his mother to laugh at it, though it was sorely against her nature to lend herself to any burlesquing of piously intended things.[1] He had become a bigger

[1] In spite of this ludicrous association Mr. Browning always recognized great merit in Watts's hymns, and still

boy since the episode of the cistern, and had probably in some degree outgrown the intense piety of his earlier childhood. This little incident seems to prove it. On the whole, however, his religious instincts did not need strengthening, though his sense of humor might get the better of them for a moment; and of secular instruction he seems to have received as little from the one set of teachers as from the other. I do not suppose that the mental training at Mr. Ready's was more shallow or more mechanical than that of most other schools of his own or, indeed, of a much later period; but the brilliant abilities of Robert Browning inspired him with a certain contempt for it, as also for the average schoolboy intelligence to which it was apparently adapted. It must be for this reason that, as he himself declared, he never gained a prize, although these rewards were showered in such profusion that the only difficulty was to avoid them; and if

more in Dr. Watts himself, who had devoted to this comparatively humble work intellectual powers competent to far higher things.

he did not make friends at school (for this also has been somewhere observed),[1] it can only be explained in the same way. He was at an intolerant age, and if his schoolfellows struck him as more backward or more stupid than they need be, he is not likely to have taken pains to conceal the impression. It is difficult, at all events, to think of him as unsociable, and his talents certainly had their amusing side. Miss Browning tells me that he made his schoolfellows act plays, some of which he had written for them; and he delighted his friends, not long ago, by mimicking his own solemn appearance on some breaking-up or commemorative day, when, according to programme, "Master Brown-

[1] It was in no case literally true. William, afterwards Sir William, Channel was leaving Mr. Ready when Browning went to him; but a friendly acquaintance began, and was afterwards continued, between the two boys; and a closer friendship, formed with a younger brother, Frank, was only interrupted by his death. Another school friend or acquaintance recalled himself as such to the poet's memory some ten or twelve years ago. A man who has reached the age at which his boyhood becomes of interest to the world may even have survived many such relations.

ing" ascended a platform in the presence of assembled parents and friends, and, in best jacket, white gloves, and carefully curled hair, with a circular bow to the company and the then prescribed waving of alternate arms, delivered a high-flown rhymed address of his own composition.

And during the busy idleness of his school-days, or, at all events, in the holidays in which he rested from it, he was learning, as perhaps only those do learn whose real education is derived from home. His father's house was, Miss Browning tells me, literally crammed with books; and, she adds, "it was in this way that Robert became very early familiar with subjects generally unknown to boys." He read omnivorously, though certainly not without guidance. One of the books he best and earliest loved was "Quarles' Emblemes," which his father possessed in a seventeenth century edition, and which contains one or two very tentative specimens of his early handwriting. Its quaint, powerful lines and still quainter illustrations combined

the marvelous with what he believed to be true; and he seemed specially identified with its world of religious fancies by the fact that the soul in it was always depicted as a child. On its more general grounds his reading was at once largely literary and very historical; and it was in this direction that the paternal influence was most strongly revealed. "Quarles' Emblemes" was only one of the large collection of old books which Mr. Browning possessed; and the young Robert learnt to know each favorite author in the dress as well as the language which carried with it the life of his period. The first edition of "Robinson Crusoe;" the first edition of Milton's works, bought for him by his father; a treatise on astrology published twenty years after the introduction of printing; the original pamphlet "Killing no Murder" (1559), which Carlyle borrowed for his "Life of Cromwell;" an equally early copy of Bernard Mandeville's "Bees;" very ancient Bibles — are some of the instances which occur to me. Among more modern publi-

cations, "Walpole's Letters" were familiar to him in boyhood, as well as the "Letters of Junius," and all the works of Voltaire.

Ancient poets and poetry also played their necessary part in the mental culture superintended by Robert Browning's father; we can indeed imagine no case in which they would not have found their way into the boy's life. Latin poets and Greek dramatists came to him in their due time, though his special delight in the Greek language only developed itself later. But his loving, lifelong familiarity with the Elizabethan school, and indeed with the whole range of English poetry, seems to point to a more constant study of our national literature. Byron was his chief master in those early poetic days. He never ceased to honor him as the one poet who combined a constructive imagination with the more technical qualities of his art; and the result of this period of æsthetic training was a volume of short poems produced, we are told, when he was only twelve, in which the Byronic influence was predominant.

The young author gave his work the title of "Incondita," which conveyed a certain idea of deprecation. He was, nevertheless, very anxious to see it in print; and his father and mother, poetry-lovers of the old school, also found in it sufficient merit to justify its publication. No publisher, however, could be found; and we can easily believe that he soon afterwards destroyed the little manuscript, in some mingled reaction of disappointment and disgust. But his mother, meanwhile, had shown it to an acquaintance of hers, Miss Flower, who herself admired its contents so much as to make a copy of them for the inspection of her friend, the well-known Unitarian minister, Mr. W. J. Fox. The copy was transmitted to Mr. Browning after Mr. Fox's death by his daughter, Mrs. Bridell-Fox; and this, if no other, was in existence in 1871, when, at his urgent request, that lady also returned to him a fragment of verse contained in a letter from Miss Sarah Flower. Nor was it till much later that a friend, who had earnestly

begged for a sight of it, definitely heard of its destruction. The fragment, which doubtless shared the same fate, was, I am told, a direct imitation of Coleridge's "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter."

These poems were not Mr. Browning's first. It would be impossible to believe them such when we remember that he composed verses long before he could write; and a curious proof of the opposite fact has recently appeared. Two letters of the elder Mr. Browning have found their way into the market, and have been bought respectively by Mr. Dykes Campbell and Sir F. Leighton. I give the more important of them. It was addressed to Mr. Thomas Powell: —

Dear Sir, — I hope the inclosed may be acceptable as curiosities. They were written by Robert when quite a child. I once had nearly a hundred of them. But he has destroyed all that ever came in his way, having a great aversion to the practice of many biographers in recording every trifling incident

that falls in their way. He has not the slightest suspicion that any of his very juvenile performances are in existence. I have several of the originals by me. They are all extemporaneous productions, nor has any one a single alteration. There was one amongst them "On Bonaparte," — remarkably beautiful, — and had I not seen it in his own handwriting I never would have believed it to have been the production of a child. It is destroyed. Pardon my troubling you with these specimens, and requesting you never to mention it, as Robert would be very much hurt. I remain, dear sir,

Your obedient servant,

R. BROWNING.

Bank : *March* 11, 1843.

The letter was accompanied by a sheet of verses which have been sold and resold, doubtless in perfect good faith, as being those to which the writer alludes. But Miss Browning has recognized them as her father's own impromptu epigrams, well remembered in the

family, together with the occasion on which they were written. The substitution may, from the first, have been accidental.

We cannot think of all these vanished first-fruits of Mr. Browning's genius without a sense of loss, all the greater perhaps that there can have been little in them to prefigure its later forms. Their faults seem to have lain in the direction of too great splendor of language and too little wealth of thought; and Mr. Fox, who had read "Incondita" and been struck by its promise, confessed afterwards to Mr. Browning that he had feared these tendencies as his future snare. But the imitative first note of a young poet's voice may hold a rapture of inspiration which his most original later utterances will never convey. It is the child Sordello, singing against the lark.

Not even the poet's sister ever saw "Incondita." It was the only one of his finished productions which Miss Browning did not read, or even help him to write out. She was then too young to be taken into his confi-

dence. Its writing, however, had one important result. It procured for the boy-poet a preliminary introduction to the valuable literary patron and friend Mr. Fox was subsequently to be. It also supplies the first substantial record of an acquaintance which made a considerable impression on his personal life.

The Miss Flower, of whom mention has been made, was one of two sisters, both sufficiently noted for their artistic gifts to have found a place in the new Dictionary of National Biography. The elder, Eliza or Lizzie, was a musical composer; the younger, best known as Sarah Flower Adams, a writer of sacred verse. Her songs and hymns, including the well-known "Nearer, my God, to Thee," were often set to music by her sister.[1] They sang, I am told, delightfully together, and often without accompaniment, their voices perfectly harmonizing with each other. Both

[1] She also wrote a dramatic poem in five acts, entitled *Vivia Perpetua*, referred to by Mrs. Jameson in her *Sacred and Legendary Art*, and by Leigh Hunt, when he spoke of her in *Blue-Stocking Revels*, as "Mrs. Adams, rare mistress of thought and of tears."

were, in their different ways, very attractive; both interesting, not only from their talents, but from their attachment to each other, and the delicacy which shortened their lives. They died of consumption, the elder in 1846, at the age of forty-three; the younger a year later. They became acquainted with Mrs. Browning through a common friend, Miss Sturtevant; and the young Robert conceived a warm admiration for Miss Flower's talents, and a boyish love for herself. She was nine years his senior; her own affections became probably engaged, and, as time advanced, his feeling seems to have subsided into one of warm and very loyal friendship. We hear, indeed, of his falling in love, as he was emerging from his teens, with a handsome girl who was on a visit at his father's house. But the fancy died out "for want of root." The admiration, even tenderness, for Miss Flower had so deep a "root" that he never in latest life mentioned her name with indifference. In a letter to Mr. Dykes Campbell, in 1881, he spoke of her as "a very remarkable per-

son." If, in spite of his denials, any woman inspired "Pauline," it can have been no other than she. He began writing to her at twelve or thirteen, probably on the occasion of her expressed sympathy with his first distinct effort at authorship; and what he afterwards called "the few utterly insignificant scraps of letters and verse" which formed his part of the correspondence were preserved by her as long as she lived. But he recovered and destroyed them after his return to England, with all the other reminiscences of those early years. Some notes, however, are extant, dated respectively, 1841, 1842, and 1845, and will be given in their due place.

Miss Fox was a friend of Miss Flower's father (Benjamin Flower, known as editor of the "Cambridge Intelligencer"), and, at his death in 1829, became co-executor to his will, and a kind of guardian to his daughters, then both unmarried, and motherless from their infancy. Eliza's principal work was a collection of hymns and anthems, originally composed for Mr. Fox's chapel, where she had

assumed the entire management of the choral part of the service. Her abilities were not confined to music; she possessed, I am told, an instinctive taste and judgment in literary matters. which caused her opinion to be much valued by literary men. But Mr. Browning's genuine appreciation of her musical genius was probably the strongest permanent bond between them. We shall hear of this in his own words.

CHAPTER IV.

1826–1833.

First Impressions of Keats and Shelley. — Prolonged Influence of Shelley. — Details of Home Education. — Its Effects. — Youthful Restlessness. — Counteracting Love of Home. — Early Friendships : Alfred Domett, Joseph Arnould, the Silverthornes. — Choice of Poetry as a Profession. — Alternative Suggestions ; mistaken Rumors concerning them. — Interest in Art. — Love of good Theatrical Performances. — Talent for Acting. — Final Preparation for Literary Life.

At the period at which we have arrived, which is that of his leaving school and completing his fourteenth year, another and a significant influence was dawning on Robert Browning's life, — the influence of the poet Shelley. Mr. Sharp writes,[1] and I could only state the facts in similar words : " Passing a bookstall one day, he saw, in a box of second-hand volumes, a little book advertised as ' Mr.

[1] *Life of Browning*, pp. 30, 31.

Shelley's Atheistical Poem: very scarce.' . . . From vague remarks in reply to his inquiries, and from one or two casual allusions, he learned that there really was a poet called Shelley; that he had written several volumes; that he was dead. . . . He begged his mother to procure him Shelley's works, a request not easily complied with, for the excellent reason that not one of the local booksellers had even heard of the poet's name. Ultimately, however, Mrs. Browning learned that what she sought was procurable at the Olliers', in Vere Street, London."

Mrs. Browning went to Messrs. Ollier, and brought back "most of Shelley's writings, all in their first edition, with the exception of 'The Cenci.'" She brought also three volumes of the still less known John Keats, on being assured that one who liked Shelley's works would like these also.

Keats and Shelley must always remain connected in this epoch of Mr. Browning's poetic growth. They indeed came to him as the two nightingales which, he told some friends, sang

together in the May-night which closed this eventful day: one in the laburnum in his father's garden, the other in a copper beech which stood on adjoining ground, — with the difference, indeed, that he must often have listened to the feathered singers before, while the two new human voices sounded from what were to him, as to so many later hearers, unknown heights and depths of the imaginative world. Their utterance was, to such a spirit as his, the last, as in a certain sense the first, word of what poetry can say; and no one who has ever heard him read the "Ode to a Nightingale," and repeat in the same subdued tones, as if continuing his own thoughts, some line from "Epipsychidion," can doubt that they retained a lasting and almost equal place in his poet's heart. But the two cannot be regarded as equals in their relation to his life, and it would be a great mistake to impute to either any important influence upon his genius. We may catch some fleeting echoes of Keats's melody in "Pippa Passes;" it is almost a commonplace that some measure of Shel-

leyan fancy is recognizable in "Pauline." But the poetic individuality of Robert Browning was stronger than any circumstance through which it could be fed. It would have found nourishment in desert air. With his first accepted work he threw off what was foreign to his poetic nature, to be thenceforward his own never-to-be-subdued and never-to-be-mistaken self. If Shelley became, and long remained for him, the greatest poet of his age, — of almost any age, — it was not because he held him greatest in the poetic art, but because in his case, beyond all others, he believed its exercise to have been prompted by the truest spiritual inspiration.

It is difficult to trace the process by which this conviction formed itself in the boy's mind; still more to account for the strong personal tenderness which accompanied it. The facts can have been scarcely known which were to present Shelley to his imagination as a maligned and persecuted man. It is hard to judge how far such human qualities as we now read into his work could be appar-

ent to one who only approached him through it. But the extra-human note in Shelley's genius irresistibly suggested to the Browning of fourteen, as it still did to the Browning of forty, the presence of a lofty spirit, one dwelling in the communion of higher things. There was often a deep sadness in his utterance; the consecration of an early death was upon him. And so the worship rooted itself and grew. It was to find its lyrical expression in "Pauline;" its rational and, from the writer's point of view, philosophic justification in the prose essay on Shelley, published eighteen years afterwards.

It may appear inconsistent with the nature of this influence that it began by appealing to him in a subversive form. The Shelley whom Browning first loved was the Shelley of "Queen Mab," the Shelley who would have remodeled the whole system of religious belief, as of human duty and rights; and the earliest result of the new development was that he became a professing atheist, and, for two years, a practicing vegetarian. He re-

turned to his natural diet when he found his eyesight becoming weak. The atheism cured itself; we do not exactly know when or how. What we do know is, that it was with him a passing state of moral or imaginative rebellion, and not one of rational doubt. His mind was not so constituted that such doubt could fasten itself upon it; nor did he ever in after-life speak of this period of negation except as an access of boyish folly, with which his maturer self could have no concern. The return to religious belief did not shake his faith in his new prophet. It only made him willing to admit that he had misread him.

This Shelley period of Robert Browning's life — that which intervened between "Incondita" and "Pauline" — remained, nevertheless, one of rebellion and unrest, to which many circumstances may have contributed besides the influence of the one mind. It had been decided that he was to complete, or at all events continue, his education at home; and, knowing the elder Mr. Browning as we do, we cannot doubt that the best reasons, of

kindness or expediency, led to his so deciding. It was none the less, probably, a mistake, for the time being. The conditions of home life were the more favorable for the young poet's imaginative growth; but there can rarely have been a boy whose moral and mental health had more to gain by the combined discipline and freedom of a public school. His home training was made to include everything which in those days went to the production of an accomplished gentleman, and a great deal therefore that was physically good. He learned music, singing, dancing, riding, boxing, and fencing, and excelled in the more active of these pursuits. The study of music was also serious, and carried on under two masters. Mr. John Relfe, author of a valuable work on counterpoint, was his instructor in thorough-bass; Mr. Abel, a pupil of Moscheles, in execution. He wrote music for songs which he himself sang; among them Donne's "Go and catch a falling star;" Hood's "I will not have the mad Clytie;" Peacock's "The mountain sheep are sweeter;" and his settings, all of

which he subsequently destroyed, were, I am told, very spirited. His education seems otherwise to have been purely literary. For two years, from the age of fourteen to that of sixteen, he studied with a French tutor, who, whether this was intended or not, imparted to him very little but a good knowledge of the French language and literature. In his eighteenth year he attended, for a term or two, a Greek class at the London University. His classical and other reading was probably continued. But we hear nothing in the programme of mathematics, or logic — of any, in short, of those subjects which train, even coerce, the thinking powers, and which were doubly requisite for a nature in which the creative imagination was predominant over all the other mental faculties, great as these other faculties were. And, even as poet, he suffered from this omission : since the involutions and overlappings of thought and phrase, which occur in his earlier and again in his latest works, must have been partly due to his never learning to follow the processes of more nor-

mally constituted minds. It would be a great error to suppose that they ever arose from the absence of a meaning clearly felt, if not always clearly thought out, by himself. He was storing his memory and enriching his mind; but precisely in so doing he was nourishing the consciousness of a very vivid and urgent personality; and, under the restrictions inseparable from the life of a home-bred youth, it was becoming a burden to him. What outlet he found in verse we do not know, because nothing survives of what he may then have written. It is possible that the fate of his early poems, and, still more, the change of ideals, retarded the definite impulse towards poetic production. It would be a relief to him to sketch out and elaborate the plan of his future work — his great mental portrait gallery of typical men and women; and he was doing so during at least the later years which preceded the birth of "Pauline." But even this must have been the result of some protracted travail with himself; because it was only the inward sense of very varied possibilities of ex-

istence which could have impelled him towards this kind of creation. No character he ever produced was merely a figment of the brain.

It was natural, therefore, that during this time of growth he should have been not only more restless, but less amiable than at any other. The always impatient temper assumed a quality of aggressiveness. He behaved as a youth will who knows himself to be clever, and believes that he is not appreciated, because the crude or paradoxical forms which his cleverness assumes do not recommend it to his elders' minds. He set the judgments of those about him at defiance, and gratuitously proclaimed himself everything that he was, and some things that he was not. All this subdued itself as time advanced, and the coming man in him could throw off the wayward child. It was all so natural that it might well be forgotten. But it distressed his mother, the one being in the world whom he entirely loved; and deserves remembering in the tender sorrow with which he himself remembered it. He was always ready to say that he had

been worth little in his young days; indeed, his self-depreciation covered the greater part of his life. This was, perhaps, one reason of the difficulty of inducing him to dwell upon his past. "I am better now," he has said more than once, when its reminiscences have been invoked.

One tender little bond maintained itself between his mother and himself so long as he lived under the paternal roof; it was his rule never to go to bed without giving her a good-night kiss. If he was out so late that he had to admit himself with a latchkey, he nevertheless went to her in her room. Nor did he submit to this as a necessary restraint; for, except on the occasions of his going abroad, it is scarcely on record that he ever willingly spent a night away from home. It may not stand for much, or it may stand to the credit of his restlessness, that, when he had been placed with some gentleman in Gower Street, for the convenience of attending the University lectures, or for the sake of preparing for them, he broke through the arrangement at

the end of a week; but even an agreeable visit had no power to detain him beyond a few days.

This home-loving quality was in curious contrast to the natural bohemianism of youthful genius, and the inclination to wildness which asserted itself in his boyish days. It became the more striking as he entered upon the age at which no reasonable amount of freedom can have been denied to him. Something, perhaps, must be allowed for the pecuniary dependence which forbade his forming any expensive habits of amusement; but he also claims the credit of having been unable to accept any low-life pleasures in place of them. I do not know how the idea can have arisen that he willingly sought his experience in the society of "gypsies and tramps." I remember nothing in his works which even suggests such association; and it is certain that a few hours spent at a fair would at all times have exhausted his capability of enduring it. In the most audacious imaginings of his later life, in the most undisciplined acts of his early

youth, were always present curious delicacies and reserves. There was always latent in him the real goodness of heart which would not allow him to trifle consciously with other lives. Work must also have been his safeguard when the habit of it had been acquired, and when imagination, once his master, had learned to serve him.

One tangible cause of his youthful restlessness has been implied in the foregoing remarks, but deserves stating in his sister's words: "The fact was, poor boy, he had outgrown his social surroundings. They were absolutely good, but they were narrow; it could not be otherwise; he chafed under them." He was not, however, quite without congenial society even before the turning-point in his outward existence which was reached in the publication of "Pauline;" and one long friendly acquaintance, together with one lasting friendship, had their roots in these early Camberwell days. The families of Joseph Arnould and Alfred Domett both lived at Camberwell. These two young men were bred

to the legal profession, and the former, afterwards Sir Joseph Arnould, became a judge in Bombay. But the father of Alfred Domett had been one of Nelson's captains, and the roving sailor spirit was apparent in his son; for he had scarcely been called to the Bar when he started for New Zealand on the instance of a cousin who had preceded him, but who was drowned in the course of a day's surveying before he could arrive. He became a member of the New Zealand Parliament, and ultimately, for a short time, of its Cabinet; only returning to England after an absence of thirty years. This Mr. Domett seems to have been a very modest man, besides a devoted friend of Robert Browning's, and on occasion a warm defender of his works. When he read the apostrophe to "Alfred, dear friend," in the "Guardian Angel," he had reached the last line before it occurred to him that the person invoked could be he. I do not think that this poem and that directly addressed to him under the pseudonym of "Waring" were the only ones inspired by the affectionate re-

membrance which he had left in their author's mind.

Among his boy companions were also the three Silverthornes, his neighbors at Camberwell, and cousins on the maternal side. They appear to have been wild youths, and had certainly no part in his intellectual or literary life; but the group is interesting to his biographer. The three brothers were all gifted musicians; having also, probably, received this endowment from their mother's father. Mr. Browning conceived a great affection for the eldest, and on the whole most talented of the cousins; and when he had died — young, as they all did — he wrote "May and Death" in remembrance of him. The name of "Charles" stands there for the old, familiar "Jim," so often uttered by him in half-pitying, and all-affectionate allusion, in his later years. Mrs. Silverthorne was the aunt who paid for the printing of "Pauline."

It was at about the time of his short attendance at University College that the choice of poetry as his future profession was

formally made. It was a foregone conclusion in the young Robert's mind; and little less in that of his father, who took too sympathetic an interest in his son's life not to have seen in what direction his desires were tending. He must, it is true, at some time or other, have played with the thought of becoming an artist; but the thought can never have represented a wish. If he had entertained such a one, it would have met not only with no opposition on his father's part, but with a very ready assent, nor does the question ever seem to have been seriously mooted in the family councils. It would be strange, perhaps, if it had. Mr. Browning became very early familiar with the names of the great painters, and also learned something about their work; for the Dulwich Gallery was within a pleasant walk of his home, and his father constantly took him there. He retained through life a deep interest in art and artists, and became a very familiar figure in one or two London studios. Some drawings made by him from the nude, in Italy, and for which he had prepared him-

self by assiduous copying of casts and study of human anatomy, had, I believe, great merit. But painting was one of the subjects in which he never received instruction, though he modeled, under the direction of his friend Mr. Story; and a letter of his own will presently show that, in his youth at least, he never credited himself with exceptional artistic power. That he might have become an artist, and perhaps a great one, is difficult to doubt, in the face of his brilliant general ability and special gifts. The power to do a thing is, however, distinct from the impulse to do it, and proved so in the present case.

More importance may be given to an idea of his father's that he should qualify himself for the Bar. It would naturally coincide with the widening of the social horizon which his University College classes supplied; it was possibly suggested by the fact that the closest friends he had already made, and others whom he was perhaps now making, were barristers. But this also remained an idea. He might have been placed in the Bank of England,

where the virtual offer of an appointment had been made to him through his father; but the elder Browning spontaneously rejected this, as unworthy of his son's powers. He had never, he said, liked bank work himself, and could not, therefore, impose it on him.

We have still to notice another, and a more mistaken view of the possibilities of Mr. Browning's life. It has been recently stated, doubtless on the authority of some words of his own, that the Church was a profession to which he once felt himself drawn. But an admission of this kind could only refer to that period of his childhood when natural impulse, combined with his mother's teaching and guidance, frequently caused his fancy and his feelings to assume a religious form. From the time when he was a free agent he ceased to be even a regular churchgoer, though religion became more, rather than less, an integral part of his inner life; and his alleged fondness for a variety of preachers meant really that he only listened to those who, from personal association or conspicuous merit, were interest-

ing to him. I have mentioned Canon Melvill as one of these ; the Rev. Thomas Jones was, as will be seen, another. In Venice he constantly, with his sister, joined the congregation of an Italian minister of the little Vaudois church there.[1]

It would be far less surprising if we were told, on sufficient authority, that he had been disturbed by hankerings for the stage. He was a passionate admirer of good acting, and would walk from London to Richmond and back again to see Edmund Kean when he was performing there. We know how Macready impressed him, though the finer genius of Kean became very apparent to his retrospective judgment of the two ; and it was impossible to see or hear him, as even an old man, in

[1] Mr. Browning's memory recalled a first and last effort at preaching, inspired by one of his very earliest visits to a place of worship. He extemporized a surplice or gown, climbed into an armchair by way of pulpit, and held forth so vehemently that his scarcely more than baby sister was frightened and began to cry ; whereupon he turned to an imaginary presence, and said, with all the sternness which the occasion required, " Pew-opener, remove that child."

some momentary personation of one of Shakespeare's characters, above all of Richard III., and not feel that a great actor had been lost in him.

So few professions were thought open to gentlemen in Robert Browning's eighteenth year, that his father's acquiescence in that which he had chosen might seem a matter scarcely less of necessity than of kindness. But we must seek the kindness not only in this first, almost inevitable, assent to his son's becoming a writer, but in the subsequent unfailing readiness to support him in his literary career. "Paracelsus," "Sordello," and the whole of "Bells and Pomegranates" were published at his father's expense, and, incredible as it appears, brought no return to him. This was vividly present to Mr. Browning's mind in what Mrs. Kemble so justly defines as those "remembering days" which are the natural prelude to the forgetting ones. He declared, in the course of these, to a friend, that for it alone he owed more to his father than to any one else in the world. Words to

this effect, spoken in conversation with his sister, have since, as it was right they should, found their way into print. The more justly will the world interpret any incidental admission he may ever have made, of intellectual disagreement between that father and himself.

When the die was cast, and young Browning was definitely to adopt literature as his profession, he qualified himself for it by reading and digesting the whole of Johnson's Dictionary. We cannot be surprised to hear this of one who displayed so great a mastery of words, and so deep a knowledge of the capacities of the English language.

CHAPTER V.

1833–1835.

"Pauline." — Letters to Mr. Fox. — Publication of the Poem; chief Biographical and Literary Characteristics. — Mr. Fox's Review in the "Monthly Repository;" other Notices. — Russian Journey. — Desired Diplomatic Appointment. — Minor Poems; first Sonnet; their Mode of Appearance. — "The Trifler." — M. de Ripert-Monclar. — "Paracelsus." — Letters to Mr. Fox concerning it; its Publication. — Incidental Origin of "Paracelsus;" its inspiring Motive; its Relation to "Pauline." — Mr. Fox's Review of it in the "Monthly Repository." — Article in the "Examiner" by John Forster.

Before Mr. Browning had half completed his twenty-first year he had written "Pauline, a Fragment of a Confession." His sister was in the secret, but this time his parents were not. This is why his aunt, hearing that "Robert" had "written a poem," volunteered the sum requisite for its publication. Even this first installment of success did not inspire

much hope in the family mind, and Miss Browning made pencil copies of her favorite passages for the event, which seemed only too possible, of her never seeing the whole poem again. It was, however, accepted by Saunders and Otley, and appeared anonymously in 1833. Meanwhile the young author had bethought himself of his early sympathizer, Mr. Fox, and he wrote to him as follows (the letter is undated): —

Dear Sir, — Perhaps by the aid of the subjoined initials and a little reflection, you may recollect an oddish sort of boy, who had the honor of being introduced to you at Hackney some years back — at that time a sayer of verse and a doer of it, and whose doings you had a little previously commended after a fashion — (whether in earnest or not, God knows): that individual it is who takes the liberty of addressing one whose slight commendation then was more thought of than all the gun, drum, and trumpet of praise would be now, and to submit to you a free

and easy sort of thing which he wrote some months ago "on one leg" and which comes out this week — having either heard or dreamed that you contribute to the "Westminster."

Should it be found too insignificant for cutting up, I shall no less remain, dear sir,

Your most obedient servant,

R. B.

I have forgotten the main thing — which is to beg you not to spoil a loophole I have kept for backing out of the thing if necessary, "sympathy of dear friends," etc., etc., none of whom know anything about it.

Monday morning; Rev. —— Fox.

The answer was clearly encouraging, and Mr. Browning wrote again: —

Dear Sir, — In consequence of your kind permission I send, or will send, a dozen copies of "Pauline" and (to mitigate the infliction) Shelley's Poem — on account of what you

mentioned this morning. It will perhaps be as well that you let me know their safe arrival by a line to R. B., junior, Hanover Cottage, Southampton Street, Camberwell. You must not think me too encroaching, if I make the getting back "Rosalind and Helen" an excuse for calling on you some evening — the said "R. and H." has, I observe, been well thumbed and sedulously marked by an acquaintance of mine, but I have not time to rub out his labor of love. I am, dear sir,

Yours very really,

R. Browning.

Camberwell, 2 o'clock.

At the left-hand corner of the first page of this note is written: "The parcel — a 'Pauline' parcel — is come. I send one as a witness."

On the inner page is written: —

"Impromptu on hearing a sermon by the Rev. T. R. — pronounced 'heavy'" —

"A *heavy* sermon! — sure the error 's great,
For not a word Tom uttered *had its weight.*"

A third letter, also undated, but postmarked March 29, 1833, refers probably to the promise or announcement of a favorable notice. A fourth conveys Mr. Browning's thanks for the notice itself: —

My dear Sir, — I have just received your letter, which I am desirous of acknowledging before any further mark of your kindness reaches me; — I can only offer you my simple thanks — but they are of the sort that one can give only once or twice in a life: all things considered, I think you are almost repaid, if you imagine what I must feel — and it will have been worth while to have made a fool of myself, only to have obtained a "case" which leaves my fine fellow Mandeville at a dead lock.

As for the book — I hope ere long to better it, and to deserve your goodness.

In the mean time I shall not forget the extent to which I am, dear sir,

Your most obliged and obedient servant,

R. B.

S. & O.'s, Conduit St., Thursday m-g.

I must intrude on your attention, my dear sir, once more than I had intended — but a notice like the one I have read will have its effect at all hazards.

I can only say that I am very proud to feel as grateful as I do, and not altogether hopeless of justifying, by effort at least, your most generous "coming forward." Hazlitt wrote his essays, as he somewhere tells us, mainly to send them to some one in the country who had "always prophesied he would be something"! — I shall never write a line without thinking of the source of my first praise, be assured.

I am, dear sir,

Yours most truly and obliged,

ROBERT BROWNING.

March 31, 1833.

Mr. Fox was then editor of a periodical called the "Monthly Repository," which, as his daughter, Mrs. Bridell-Fox, writes in her graceful article on Robert Browning, in the "Argosy" for February, 1890, he was endeavoring to raise from its original denomi-

national character into a first-class literary and political journal. The articles comprised in the volume for 1833 are certainly full of interest and variety, at once more popular and more solid than those prescribed by the present fashion of monthly magazines. He reviewed "Pauline" favorably in its April number — that is, as soon as it had appeared; and the young poet thus received from him an introduction to what should have been, though it probably was not, a large circle of intelligent readers.

The poem was characterized by its author, five years later, in a fantastic note appended to a copy of it, as "the only remaining crab of the shapely Tree of Life in my Fool's Paradise." This name is ill bestowed upon a work which, however wild a fruit of Mr. Browning's genius, contains, in its many lines of exquisite fancy and deep pathos, so much that is rich and sweet. It had also, to discard metaphor, its faults of exaggeration and confusion; and it is of these that Mr. Browning was probably thinking when he wrote his

more serious apologetic preface to its reprint in 1868. But these faults were partly due to his conception of the character which he had tried to depict; and partly to the inherent difficulty of depicting one so complex, in a succession of mental and moral states, irrespectively of the conditions of time, place, and circumstance which were involved in them. Only a very powerful imagination could have inspired such an attempt. A still more conspicuous effort of creative genius reveals itself at its close. The moment chosen for the "Confession" has been that of a supreme moral or physical crisis. The exhaustion attendant on this is directly expressed by the person who makes it, and may also be recognized in the vivid, yet confusing, intensity of the reminiscences of which it consists. But we are left in complete doubt as to whether the crisis is that of approaching death or incipient convalescence, or which character it bears in the sufferer's mind; and the language used in the closing pages is such as to suggest, without the slightest break in poetic

continuity, alternately the one conclusion and the other. This was intended by Browning to assist his anonymity; and when the writer in "Tait's Magazine" spoke of the poem as a piece of pure bewilderment, he expressed the natural judgment of the Philistine, while proving himself such. If the notice by J. S. Mill, which this criticism excluded, was indeed — as Mr. Browning always believed — much more sympathetic, I can only record my astonishment; for there never was a large and cultivated intelligence one can imagine less in harmony than his with the poetic excesses, or even the poetic qualities of "Pauline." But this is a digression.

Mr. Fox, though an accomplished critic, made very light of the artistic blemishes of the work. His admiration for it was as generous as it was genuine; and, having recognized in it the hand of a rising poet, it was more congenial to him to hail that poet's advent than to register his shortcomings.

"The poem," he says, "though evidently a hasty and imperfect sketch, has truth and life

in it, which gave us the thrill, and laid hold of us with the power, the sensation of which has never yet failed us as a test of genius."

But it had also, in his mind, a distinguishing characteristic, which raised it above the sphere of merely artistic criticism. The article continues: —

"We have never read anything more purely confessional. The whole composition is of the spirit, spiritual. The scenery is in the chambers of thought; the agencies are powers and passions; the events are transitions from one state of spiritual existence to another."

And we learn from the context that he accepted this confessional and introspective quality as an expression of the highest emotional life — of the essence, therefore, of religion. On this point the sincerest admirers of the poem may find themselves at issue with Mr. Fox. Its sentiment is warmly religious; it is always, in a certain sense, spiritual; but its intellectual activities are exercised on entirely temporal ground, and this fact would

generally be admitted as the negation of spirituality in the religious sense of the word. No difference, however, of opinion as to his judgment of "Pauline" can lessen our appreciation of Mr. Fox's encouraging kindness to its author. No one who loved Mr. Browning in himself, or in his work, can read the last lines of this review without a throb of affectionate gratitude for the sympathy so ungrudgingly, and — as he wrote during his latest years — so opportunely given: —

"In recognizing a poet we cannot stand upon trifles nor fret ourselves about such matters [as a few blemishes]. Time enough for that afterwards, when larger works come before us. Archimedes in the bath had many particulars to settle about specific gravities and Hiero's crown, but he first gave a glorious leap and shouted *Eureka!*"

Many persons have discovered Mr. Browning since he has been known to fame. One only discovered him in his obscurity.

Next to that of Mr. Fox stands the name of John Forster among the first spontaneous

appreciators of Mr. Browning's genius; and his admiration was, in its own way, the more valuable for the circumstances which precluded in it all possible, even unconscious, bias of personal interest or sympathy. But this belongs to a somewhat later period of our history.

I am dwelling at some length on this first experience of Mr. Browning's literary career, because the confidence which it gave him determined its immediate future, if not its ultimate course, — because, also, the poem itself is more important to the understanding of his mind than perhaps any other of his isolated works. It was the earliest of his dramatic creations; it was therefore inevitably the most instinct with himself; and we may regard the "Confession" as to a great extent his own, without for an instant ignoring the imaginative element which necessarily and certainly entered into it. At one moment, indeed, his utterance is so emphatic that we should feel it to be direct, even if we did not know it to be true. The passage beginning

"I am made up of an intensest life," conveys something more than the writer's actual psychological state. The feverish desire of life became gradually modified into a more or less active intellectual and imaginative curiosity; but the sense of an individual, self-centred, and, as it presented itself to him, unconditioned existence, survived all the teachings of experience, and often indeed unconsciously imposed itself upon them.

I have already alluded to that other and more pathetic fragment of distinct autobiography which is to be found in the invocation to the "Sun-treader." Mr. Fox, who has quoted great part of it, justly declares that "the fervency, the remembrance, the half-regret mingling with its exultation, are as true as its leading image is beautiful." The "exultation" is in the triumph of Shelley's rising fame; the regret, for the lost privilege of worshiping in solitary tenderness at an obscure shrine. The double mood would have been characteristic of any period of Mr. Browning's life.

The artistic influence of Shelley is also discernible in the natural imagery of the poem, which reflects a fitful and emotional fancy instead of the direct poetic vision of the author's later work.

"Pauline" received another and graceful tribute two months later than the review. In an article of the "Monthly Repository," and in the course of a description of some luxuriant wood-scenery, the following passage occurs: —

"Shelley and Tennyson are the best books for this place. . . . They are natives of this soil; literally so; and if planted would grow as surely as a crowbar in Kentucky sprouts tenpenny nails. *Probatum est.* Last autumn L—— dropped a poem of Shelley's down there[1] in the wood, amongst the thick, damp, rotting leaves, and this spring some one found a delicate, exotic-looking plant, growing wild on the very spot, with 'Pauline' hanging from

[1] Mr. Browning's copy of *Rosalind and Helen*, which he had lent to Miss Flower, and which she lost in this wood on a picnic.

its slender stalk. Unripe fruit it may be, but of pleasant flavor and promise, and a mellower produce, it may be hoped, will follow."

This and a bald though well-meant notice in the "Athenæum" exhaust its literary history for this period.[1]

The anonymity of the poem was not long preserved; there was no reason why it should be. But "Pauline" was, from the first, little known or discussed beyond the immediate circle of the poet's friends; and when, twenty years later, Dante Gabriel Rossetti unexpectedly came upon it in the library of the British Museum, he could only surmise that it had been written by the author of "Paracelsus."

The only recorded event of the next two

[1] Not quite, it appears. Since I wrote the above words, Mr. Dykes Campbell has kindly copied for me the following extract from the *Literary Gazette* of March 23, 1833: —

"*Pauline: a Fragment of a Confession*, pp. 71. London, 1833. Saunders and Otley.

"Somewhat mystical, somewhat poetical, somewhat sensual, and not a little unintelligible, — this is a dreamy volume, without an object, and unfit for publication."

years was Mr. Browning's visit to Russia, which took place in the winter of 1833–34. The Russian consul-general, Mr. Benckhausen, had taken a great liking to him, and being sent to St. Petersburg on some special mission, proposed that he should accompany him, nominally in the character of secretary. The letters written to his sister during this, as during every other absence, were full of graphic description, and would have been a mine of interest for the student of his imaginative life. They are, unfortunately, all destroyed, and we have only scattered reminiscences of what they had to tell; but we know how strangely he was impressed by some of the circumstances of the journey: above all, by the endless monotony of snow-covered pine forest, through which he and his companion rushed for days and nights at the speed of six post-horses, without seeming to move from one spot. He enjoyed the society of St. Petersburg, and was fortunate enough, before his return, to witness the breaking-up of the ice on the Neva, and see the Czar perform the

yearly ceremony of drinking the first glass of water from it. He was absent about three months.

The one active career which would have recommended itself to him in his earlier youth was diplomacy; it was that which he subsequently desired for his son. He would indeed not have been averse to any post of activity and responsibility not unsuited to the training of a gentleman. Soon after his return from Russia he applied for appointment on a mission which was to be dispatched to Persia; and the careless wording of the answer which his application received made him think for a moment that it had been granted. He was much disappointed when he learned, through an interview with the "chief," that the place was otherwise filled.

In 1834 he began a little series of contributions to the "Monthly Repository," extending into 1835–36, and consisting of five poems. The earliest of these was a sonnet, not contained in any edition of Mr. Browning's works, and which, I believe, first reappeared

in Mr. Gosse's article in the "Century Magazine," December, 1881; now part of his "Personalia." The second, beginning "A king lived long ago," was to be published, with alterations and additions, as one of "Pippa's" songs. "Porphyria's Lover" and "Johannes Agricola in Meditation" were reprinted together in "Bells and Pomegranates," under the heading of "Madhouse Cells." The fifth consisted of the lines beginning "Still ailing, Wind? wilt be appeased or no?" afterwards introduced into the sixth section of "James Lee's Wife." The sonnet is not very striking, though hints of the poet's future psychological subtlety are not wanting in it; but his most essential dramatic quality reveals itself in the last three poems.

This winter of 1834–35 witnessed the birth, perhaps also the extinction, of an amateur periodical, established by some of Mr. Browning's friends; foremost among these the young Dowsons, afterwards connected with Alfred Domett. The magazine was called the "Trifler," and published in monthly numbers of

about ten pages each. It collapsed from lack of pocket-money on the part of the editors; but Mr. Browning had written for it one letter, February, 1833, signed with his usual initial Z, and entitled "Some strictures on a late article in the 'Trifler.'" This boyish production sparkles with fun, while affecting the lengthy quaintnesses of some obsolete modes of speech. The article which it attacks was "A Dissertation on Debt and Debtors," where the subject was, I imagine, treated in the orthodox way: and he expends all his paradox in showing that indebtedness is a necessary condition of human life, and all his sophistry in confusing it with the abstract sense of obligation. It is, perhaps, scarcely fair to call attention to such a mere argumentative and literary freak; but there is something so comical in a defense of debt, however transparent, proceeding from a man to whom never in his life a bill can have been sent in twice, and who would always have preferred ready-money payment to receiving a bill at all, that I may be forgiven for quoting some passages from it.

"For to be man is to be a debtor: hinting but slightly at the grand and primeval debt implied in the idea of a creation, as matter too hard for ears like thine (for saith not Luther, What hath a cow to do with nutmegs?), I must, nevertheless, remind thee that all moralists have concurred in considering this our mortal sojourn as indeed an uninterrupted state of debt, and the world our dwelling-place as represented by nothing so aptly as by an inn, wherein those who lodge most commodiously have in perspective a proportionate score to reduce,[1] and those who fare least delicately, but an insignificant shot to discharge — or, as the tuneful Quarles well phraseth it, —

> He 's most in DEBT who lingers out the day,
> Who dies betimes has less and less to pay.

So far, therefore, from these sagacious ethics holding that

> Debt cramps the energies of the soul, etc.

[1] Miss Hickey, on reading this passage, has called my attention to the fact that the sentiment which it parodies is identical with that expressed in these words of *Prospice*, —

> . . . in a minute pay glad life's arrears
> Of pain, darkness, and cold.

as thou pratest, 't is plain that they have willed on the very outset to inculcate this truth on the mind of every man, — no barren and inconsequential dogma, but an effectual, ever influencing and productive rule of life, — that he is born a debtor, lives a debtor, — ay, friend, and when thou diest, will not some judicious bystander — no recreant as thou to the bonds of nature, but a good borrower and true — remark, as did his grandsire before him on like occasions, that thou hast 'paid the *debt* of nature'? Ha! I have thee 'beyond the rules,' as one (a bailiff) may say!"

Such performances supplied a distraction to the more serious work of writing "Paracelsus," which was to be concluded in March, 1835, and which occupied the foregoing winter months. We do not know to what extent Mr. Browning had remained in communication with Mr. Fox; but the following letters show that the friend of "Pauline" gave ready and efficient help in the strangely difficult task of securing a publisher for the new poem.

The first is dated April 2, 1835.

Dear Sir, — I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter: Sardanapalus "could not go on multiplying kingdoms" — nor I protestations, — but I thank you very much.

You will oblige me indeed by forwarding the introduction to Moxon. I merely suggested him in particular, on account of his good name and fame among author-folk, besides he has himself written — as the Americans say — "more poetry 'an you can shake a stick at." So I hope we shall come to terms.

I also hope my poem will turn out not utterly unworthy your kind interest, and more deserving your favor than anything of mine you have as yet seen; indeed I all along proposed to myself such an endeavor, for it will never do for one so distinguished by past praise to prove nobody after all — *nous verrons.* I am, dear sir,

Yours most truly and obliged,

Robt. Browning.

On April 16 he wrote again as follows: —

Dear Sir, — Your communication gladdened the cockles of my heart. I lost no time in presenting myself to Moxon, but no sooner was Mr. Clarke's letter perused than the Moxonian visage lowered exceedingly thereat — the Moxonian accent grew dolorous thereupon: "Artevelde" has not paid expenses by about thirty odd pounds. Tennyson's poetry is "*popular at Cambridge*," and yet of 800 copies which were printed of his last, some 300 only have gone off: Mr. M. hardly knows whether he shall ever venture again, etc., etc., and in short begs to decline even inspecting it, etc., etc.

I called on Saunders and Otley at once, and, marvel of marvels, do really think there is some chance of our coming to decent terms — I shall know at the beginning of next week, but am not over-sanguine.

You will "sarve me out"? two words to that; being the man you are, you must need very little telling from me, of the real feeling

I have of your criticism's worth, and if I have had no more of it, surely I am hardly to blame, who have in more than one instance bored you sufficiently: but not a particle of your article has been rejected or neglected by your observant humble servant, and very proud shall I be if my new work bear in it the marks of the influence under which it was undertaken — and if I prove not a fit compeer of the potter in Horace who anticipated an amphora and produced a porridge-pot. I purposely keep back the subject until you see my conception of its capabilities — otherwise you would be planning a vase fit to give the go-by to Evander's best crockery, which my cantharus would cut but a sorry figure beside — hardly up to the ansa.

But such as it is, it is very earnest and suggestive — and likely, I hope, to do good; and though I am rather scared at the thought of a *fresh eye* going over its 4,000 lines — discovering blemishes of all sorts which my one wit cannot avail to detect: fools treated as sages, obscure passages, slipshod verses, and much

that worse is, — yet on the whole I am not much afraid of the issue, and I would give something to be allowed to read it some morning to you — for every rap o' the knuckles I should get a clap o' the back, I know.

I have another affair on hand, rather of a more popular nature, I conceive, but not so decisive and explicit on a point or two — so I decide on trying the question with this: I really shall *need* your notice, on this account; I shall affix my name and stick my arms akimbo; there are a few precious bold bits here and there, and the drift and scope are awfully radical — I am "off" forever with the other side, but must by all means be "on" with yours — a position once gained, worthier works shall follow — therefore a certain writer[1] who meditated a notice (it matters not laudatory or otherwise) on "Pauline" in the "Examiner," must be benignant or supercilious as he shall choose, but in no case an idle spectator of my first appearance on any stage (having previously only dabbled in private theatri-

[1] Mr. John Stuart Mill.

cals) and bawl "Hats off!" "Down in front!" etc., as soon as I get to the proscenium; and he may depend that though my "Now is the winter of our discontent" be rather awkward, yet there shall be occasional outbreaks of good stuff — that I shall warm as I get on, and finally wish "Richmond at the bottom of the seas," etc., in the best style imaginable.

Excuse all this swagger, I know you will, and

(The signature has been cut off; evidently for an autograph.)

Mr. Effingham Wilson was induced to publish the poem, but more, we understand, on the ground of radical sympathies in Mr. Fox and the author than on that of its intrinsic worth.

The title-page of "Paracelsus" introduces us to one of the warmest friendships of Mr. Browning's life. Count de Ripert-Monclar was a young French Royalist, one of those who had accompanied the Duchesse de Berri on her Chouan expedition, and was then, for

a few years, spending his summers in England; ostensibly for his pleasure, really — as he confessed to the Browning family — in the character of private agent of communication between the royal exiles and their friends in France. He was four years older than the poet, and of intellectual tastes which created an immediate bond of union between them. In the course of one of their conversations, he suggested the life of Paracelsus as a possible subject for a poem; but on second thoughts pronounced it unsuitable, because it gave no room for the introduction of love: about which, he added, every young man of their age thought he had something quite new to say. Mr. Browning decided, after the necessary study, that he would write a poem on Paracelsus, but treating him in his own way. It was dedicated, in fulfillment of a promise, to the friend to whom its inspiration had been due.

The Count's visits to England entirely ceased, and the two friends did not meet for twenty years. Then, one day, in a street in

Rome, Mr. Browning heard a voice behind him crying, "Robert!" He turned, and there was "Amédée." Both were, by that time, married; the Count — then, I believe, Marquis — to an English lady, Miss Jerningham. Mrs. Browning, to whom of course he was introduced, liked him very much.[1]

Mr. Browning did treat Paracelsus in his own way; and in so doing produced a character — at all events a history — which, according to recent judgments, approached far nearer to the reality than any conception which had until then been formed of it. He had carefully collected all the known facts of the great discoverer's life, and interpreted them with a sympathy which was no less an intuition of their truth than a reflection of his own genius upon them. We are enabled in some measure to judge of this by a paper entitled "Paracelsus, the Reformer of Medicine," written by

[1] A minor result of the intimacy was that Mr. Browning became member, in 1835, of the Institut Historique, and in 1836 of the Société Française de Statistique Universelle, to both of which learned bodies his friend belonged.

Dr. Edward Berdoe for the Browning Society, and read at its October meeting in 1888; and in the difficulty which exists for most of us of verifying the historical data of Mr. Browning's poem, it becomes a valuable guide to, as well as an interesting comment upon it.

Dr. Berdoe reminds us that we cannot understand the real Paracelsus without reference to the occult sciences so largely cultivated in his day, as also to the mental atmosphere which produced them; and he quotes in illustration a passage from the writings of that Bishop of Spanheim who was the instructor of Paracelsus, and who appears as such in the poem. The passage is a definition of divine magic, which is apparently another term for alchemy; and lays down the great doctrine of all mediæval occultism, as of all modern theosophy — of a soul-power equally operative in the material and the immaterial, in nature and in the consciousness of man.

The same clue will guide us, as no other can, through what is apparently conflicting in the aims and methods, anomalous in the

moral experience, of the Paracelsus of the poem. His feverish pursuit, among the things of Nature, of an ultimate of knowledge, not contained, even in fragments, in her isolated truths; the sense of failure which haunts his most valuable attainments; his tampering with the lower or diabolic magic, when the divine has failed; the ascetic exaltation in which he begins his career; the sudden awakening to the spiritual sterility which has been consequent on it, — all these find their place, if not always their counterpart, in the real life.

The language of Mr. Browning's Paracelsus, his attitude towards himself and the world, are not, however, quite consonant with the alleged facts. They are more appropriate to an ardent explorer of the world of abstract thought than to a mystical scientist pursuing the secret of existence. He preserves, in all his mental vicissitudes, a loftiness of tone and a unity of intention, difficult to connect, even in fancy, with the real man, in whom the inherited superstitions and the

prognostics of true science must often have clashed with each other. Dr. Berdoe's picture of the "Reformer," drawn more directly from history, conveys this double impression. Mr. Browning has rendered him more simple by, as it were, recasting him in the atmosphere of a more modern time, and of his own intellectual life. This poem still, therefore, belongs to the same group as "Pauline," though, as an effort of dramatic creation, superior to it.

We find the poet with still less of dramatic disguise in the death-bed revelation which forms so beautiful a close to the story. It supplies a fitter comment to the errors of the dramatic Paracelsus, than to those of the historical, whether or not its utterance was within the compass of historical probability, as Dr. Berdoe believes. In any case it was the direct product of Mr. Browning's mind, and expressed what was to be his permanent conviction. It might then have been an echo of German pantheistic philosophies. From the point of view of science — of mod-

ern science, at least — it was prophetic; although the prophecy of one for whom evolution could never mean less or more than a divine creation operating on this progressive plan.

The more striking, perhaps, for its personal quality are the evidences of imaginative sympathy, even direct human insight, in which the poem abounds. Festus is, indeed, an essentially human creature: the man — it might have been the woman — of unambitious intellect and large intelligence of the heart, in whom so many among us have found comfort and help. We often feel, in reading "Pauline," that the poet in it was older than the man. The impression is more strongly and more definitely conveyed by this second work, which has none of the intellectual crudeness of "Pauline," though it still belongs to an early phase of the author's intellectual life: not only its mental, but its moral maturity, seems so much in advance of his uncompleted twenty-third year.

To the first edition of "Paracelsus" was

affixed a preface, now long discarded, but which acquires fresh interest in a retrospect of the author's completed work; for it lays down the constant principle of dramatic creation by which that work was to be inspired. It also anticipates probable criticism of the artistic form which on this, and so many subsequent occasions, he selected for it.

"I am anxious that the reader should not, at the very outset, — mistaking my performance for one of a class with which it has nothing in common, — judge it by principles on which it was never moulded, and subject it to a standard to which it was never meant to conform. I therefore anticipate his discovery, that it is an attempt, probably more novel than happy, to reverse the method usually adopted by writers whose aim it is to set forth any phenomenon of the mind or the passions, by the operation of persons and events; and that, instead of having recourse to an external machinery of incidents to create and evolve the crisis I desire to produce, I have ventured to display somewhat minutely

the mood itself in its rise and progress, and have suffered the agency by which it is influenced and determined, to be generally discernible in its effects alone, and subordinate throughout, if not altogether excluded: and this for a reason. I have endeavored to write a poem, not a drama: the canons of the drama are well known, and I cannot but think that, inasmuch as they have immediate regard to stage representation, the peculiar advantages they hold out are really such only so long as the purpose for which they were at first instituted is kept in view. I do not very well understand what is called a Dramatic Poem, wherein all those restrictions only submitted to on account of compensating good in the original scheme are scrupulously retained, as though for some special fitness in themselves — and all new facilities placed at an author's disposal by the vehicle he selects, as pertinaciously rejected." . . .

Mr. Fox reviewed this also in the "Monthly Repository." The article might be obtained through the kindness of Mrs. Bridell-Fox;

but it will be sufficient for my purpose to refer to its closing paragraph, as given by her in the "Argosy" of February, 1890. It was a final expression of what the writer regarded as the fitting intellectual attitude towards a rising poet, whose aims and methods lay so far beyond the range of the conventional rules of poetry. The great event in the history of "Paracelsus" was John Forster's article on it in the "Examiner." Mr. Forster had recently come to town. He could barely have heard Mr. Browning's name, and, as he afterwards told him, was perplexed in reading the poem by the question of whether its author was an old or a young man; but he knew that a writer in the "Athenæum" had called it rubbish, and he had taken it up as a probable subject for a piece of slashing criticism. What he did write can scarcely be defined as praise. It was the simple, ungrudging admission of the unequivocal power, as well as brilliant promise, which he recognized in the work. This mutual experience was the introduction to a long and, certainly on Mr. Browning's part, a sincere friendship.

CHAPTER VI.

1835–1838.

Removal to Hatcham ; some Particulars. — Renewed Intercourse with the second Family of Robert Browning's Grandfather. — Reuben Browning. — William Shergold Browning. — Visitors at Hatcham. — Thomas Carlyle. — Social Life. — New Friends and Acquaintance. — Introduction to Macready. — New Year's Eve at Elm Place. — Introduction to John Forster. — Miss Fanny Haworth. — Miss Martineau. — Serjeant Talfourd. — The "Ion" Supper. — "Strafford." — Relations with Macready. — Performance of "Strafford." — Letters concerning it from Mr. Browning and Miss Flower. — Personal Glimpses of Robert Browning. — Rival Forms of Dramatic Inspiration. — Relation of "Strafford" to "Sordello." — Mr. Robertson and the "Westminster Review."

It was soon after this time, though the exact date cannot be recalled, that the Browning family moved from Camberwell to Hatcham. Some such change had long been in contemplation, for their house was now too small; and the finding one more suitable, in

the latter place, had decided the question. The new home possessed great attractions. The long, low rooms of its upper story supplied abundant accommodation for the elder Mr. Browning's six thousand books. Mrs. Browning was suffering greatly from her chronic ailment, neuralgia; and the large garden, opening on to the Surrey hills, promised her all the benefits of country air. There were a coach-house and stable, which, by a curious, probably old-fashioned, arrangement, formed part of the house, and were accessible from it. Here the "good horse," York, was eventually put up; and near this, in the garden, the poet soon had another though humbler friend in the person of a toad, which became so much attached to him that it would follow him as he walked. He visited it daily, where it burrowed under a white rose tree, announcing himself by a pinch of gravel dropped into its hole; and the creature would crawl forth, allow its head to be gently tickled, and reward the act with that loving glance of the soft full eyes which Mr. Browning

has recalled in one of the poems of "Asolando."

This change of residence brought the grandfather's second family, for the first time, into close as well as friendly contact with the first. Mr. Browning had always remained on outwardly friendly terms with his stepmother; and both he and his children were rewarded for this forbearance by the cordial relations which grew up between themselves and two of her sons. But in the earlier days they lived too far apart for frequent meeting. The old Mrs. Browning was now a widow, and, in order to be near her relations, she also came to Hatcham, and established herself there in close neighborhood to them. She had then with her only a son and a daughter, those known to the poet's friends as Uncle Reuben and Aunt Jemima; respectively nine years, and one year, older than he. "Aunt Jemima" married not long afterwards, and is chiefly remembered as having been very amiable, and, in early youth, to use her nephew's words, "as beautiful as the day;" but kindly,

merry "Uncle Reuben," then clerk in the Rothschilds' London bank,[1] became a conspicuous member of the family circle. This does not mean that the poet was ever indebted to him for pecuniary help; and it is desirable that this should be understood, since it has been confidently asserted that he was so. So long as he was dependent at all, he depended exclusively on his father. Even the use of his uncle's horse, which might have been accepted as a friendly concession on Mr. Reuben's part, did not really represent one. The animal stood, as I have said, in Mr. Browning's stable, and it was groomed by his gardener. The promise of these conveniences had induced Reuben Browning to buy a horse instead of continuing to hire one. He could only ride it on a few days of the week, and it was rather a gain than a loss to him that so good a horseman as his nephew should exercise it during the interval.

[1] This uncle's name, and his business relations with the great Jewish firm, have contributed to the mistaken theory of the poet's descent.

Uncle Reuben was not a great appreciator of poetry — at all events of his nephew's; and an irreverent remark on "Sordello," imputed to a more eminent contemporary, proceeded, under cover of a friend's name, from him. But he had his share of mental endowments. We are told that he was a good linguist, and that he wrote on finance under an assumed name. He was also, apparently, an accomplished classic. Lord Beaconsfield is said to have declared that the inscription on a silver inkstand, presented to the daughter of Lionel Rothschild on her marriage, by the clerks at New Court, "was the most appropriate thing he had ever come across;" and that whoever had selected it must be one of the first Latin scholars of the day. It was Mr. Reuben Browning.

Another favorite uncle was William Shergold Browning, though less intimate with his nephew and niece than he would have become if he had not married while they were still children, and settled in Paris, where his father's interest had placed him in the Roths-

child house. He is known by his "History of the Huguenots," a work, we are told, "full of research, with a reference to contemporary literature for almost every occurrence mentioned or referred to." He also wrote the "Provost of Paris," and "Hoel Morven," historical novels, and "Leisure Hours," a collection of miscellanies; and was a contributor for some years to the "Gentleman's Magazine." It was chiefly from this uncle that Miss Browning and her brother heard the now often-repeated stories of their probable ancestors, Micaiah Browning, who distinguished himself at the siege of Derry, and that commander of the ship "Holy Ghost" who conveyed Henry V. to France before the battle of Agincourt, and received the coat-of-arms, with its emblematic waves, in reward for his service. Robert Browning was also indebted to him for the acquaintance of M. de Ripert-Monclar; for he was on friendly terms with the uncle of the young count, the Marquis de Fortia, a learned man and member of the Institut, and gave a letter of introduction —

actually, I believe, to his brother Reuben — at the Marquis's request.[1]

The friendly relations with Carlyle, which resulted in his high estimate of the poet's mother, also began at Hatcham. On one occasion he took his brother, the doctor, with him to dine there. An earlier and much attached friend of the family was Captain Pritchard, cousin to the noted physician Dr. Blundell. He enabled the young Robert, whom he knew from the age of sixteen, to attend some of Dr. Blundell's lectures; and this aroused in him a considerable interest in the sciences connected with medicine, though, as I shall have occasion to show, no knowledge of either disease or its treatment ever seems to have penetrated into his life. A Captain Lloyd

[1] A grandson of William Shergold, Robert Jardine Browning, graduated at Lincoln College, was called to the Bar, and is now Crown Prosecutor in New South Wales, where his name first gave rise to a report that he was Mr. Browning's son, while the announcement of his marriage was, for a moment, connected with Mr. Browning himself. He was also intimate with the poet and his sister, who liked him very much.

is indirectly associated with "The Flight of the Duchess." That poem was not completed according to its original plan; and it was the always welcome occurrence of a visit from this gentleman which arrested its completion. Mr. Browning vividly remembered how the click of the garden gate, and the sight of the familiar figure advancing towards the house, had broken in upon his work and dispelled its first inspiration.

The appearance of "Paracelsus" did not give the young poet his just place in popular judgment and public esteem. A generation was to pass before this was conceded to him. But it compelled his recognition by the leading or rising literary men of the day; and a fuller and more varied social life now opened before him. The names of Serjeant Talfourd, Horne, Leigh Hunt, Barry Cornwall (Procter), Monckton Milnes (Lord Houghton), Eliot Warburton, Dickens, Wordsworth, and Walter Savage Landor, represent, with that of Forster, some of the acquaintances made, or the friendships begun, at this period. Prominent

among the friends that were to be, was also Archer Gurney, well known in later life as the Rev. Archer Gurney, and chaplain to the British embassy in Paris. His sympathies were at present largely absorbed by politics. He was contesting the representation of some county, on the Conservative side; but he took a very vivid interest in Mr. Browning's poems; and this perhaps fixes the beginning of the intimacy at a somewhat later date, since a pretty story by which it was illustrated connects itself with the publication of "Bells and Pomegranates." He himself wrote dramas and poems. Sir John, afterwards Lord, Hanmer was also much attracted by the young poet, who spent a pleasant week with him at Bettisfield Park. He was the author of a volume entitled "Fra Cipollo and other Poems," from which the motto of "Colombe's Birthday" was subsequently taken.

The friends, old and new, met in the informal manner of those days, at afternoon dinners, or later suppers, at the houses of Mr. Fox, Serjeant Talfourd, and, as we shall see,

Mr. Macready; and Mr. Fox's daughter, then only a little girl, but intelligent and observant for her years, well remembers the pleasant gatherings at which she was allowed to assist, when first performances of plays, or first readings of plays and poems, had brought some of the younger and more ardent spirits together. Miss Flower, also, takes her place in the literary group. Her sister had married in 1834, and left her free to live for her own pursuits and her own friends; and Mr. Browning must have seen more of her then than was possible in his boyish days.

None, however, of these intimacies were, at the time, so important to him as that formed with the great actor Macready. They were introduced to each other by Mr. Fox early in the winter of 1835–36; the meeting is thus chronicled in Macready's diary, November 27:[1] —

"Went from chambers to dine with Rev. William Fox, Bayswater. . . . Mr. Robert

[1] *Macready's Reminiscences*, edited by Sir Frederick Pollock; 1875.

Browning, the author of 'Paracelsus,' came in after dinner; I was very much pleased to meet him. His face is full of intelligence. . . . I took Mr. Browning on, and requested to be allowed to improve my acquaintance with him. He expressed himself warmly, as gratified by the proposal; wished to send me his book; we exchanged cards and parted."

On December 7 he writes: —

"Read 'Paracelsus,' a work of great daring, starred with poetry of thought, feeling, and diction, but occasionally obscure; the writer can scarcely fail to be a leading spirit of his time." . . .

He invited Mr. Browning to his country house, Elm Place, Elstree, for the last evening of the year; and again refers to him under date of December 31.

. . . "Our other guests were Miss Henney, Forster, Cattermole, Browning, and Mr. Munro. Mr. Browning was very popular with the whole party; his simple and enthusiastic manner engaged attention, and won opinions from all present; he looks and speaks more

like a youthful poet than any man I ever saw."

This New Year's Eve visit brought Browning and Forster together for the first time. The journey to Elstree was then performed by coach, and the two young men met at the "Blue Posts," where, with one or more of Mr. Macready's other guests, they waited for the coach to start. They eyed each other with interest, both being striking in their way, and neither knowing who the other was. When the introduction took place at Macready's house, Mr. Forster supplemented it by saying: "Did you see a little notice of you I wrote in the 'Examiner'?" The two names will now be constantly associated in Macready's diary, which, except for Mr. Browning's own casual utterances, is almost our only record of his literary and social life during the next two years.

It was at Elm Place that Mr. Browning first met Miss Euphrasia Fanny Haworth, then a neighbor of Mr. Macready, residing with her mother at Barham Lodge. Miss Haworth was

still a young woman, but her love and talent for art and literature made her a fitting member of the genial circle to which Mr. Browning belonged; and she and the poet soon became fast friends. Her first name appears as "Eyebright" in "Sordello." His letters to her, returned after her death by her brother, Mr. Frederick Haworth, supply valuable records of his experiences and of his feelings at one very interesting, and one deeply sorrowful, period of his history. She was a thoroughly kindly, as well as gifted woman, and much appreciated by those of the poet's friends who knew her as a resident in London during her last years. A portrait which she took of him in 1874 is considered by some persons very good.

At about this time also, and probably through Miss Haworth, he became acquainted with Miss Martineau.

Soon after his introduction to Macready, if not before, Mr. Browning became busy with the thought of writing for the stage. The diary has this entry for February 16, 1836: —

"Forster and Browning called, and talked over the plot of a tragedy, which Browning had begun to think of: the subject, Narses. He said that I had *bit* him by my performance of Othello, and I told him I hoped I should make the blood come. It would indeed be some recompense for the miseries, the humiliations, the heart-sickening disgusts which I have endured in my profession, if, by its exercise, I had awakened a spirit of poetry whose influence would elevate, ennoble, and adorn our degraded drama. May it be!"

But Narses was abandoned, and the more serious inspiration and more definite motive were to come later. They connect themselves with one of the pleasant social occurrences which must have lived in the young poet's memory. On May 26 "Ion" had been performed for the first time and with great success, Mr. Macready sustaining the principal part; and the great actor and a number of their common friends had met at supper at Serjeant Talfourd's house to celebrate the occasion. The party included Wordsworth and

Landor, both of whom Mr. Browning then met for the first time. Toasts flew right and left. Mr. Browning's health was proposed by Serjeant Talfourd as that of the youngest poet of England, and Wordsworth responded to the appeal with very kindly courtesy. The conversation afterwards turned upon plays, and Macready, who had ignored a half-joking question of Miss Mitford, whether, if she wrote one, he would act in it, overtook Mr. Browning as they were leaving the house, and said, "Write a play, Browning, and keep me from going to America." The reply was, "Shall it be historical and English: what do you say to a drama on Strafford?"

This ready response on the poet's part showed that Strafford, as a dramatic subject, had been occupying his thoughts. The subject was in the air, because Forster was then bringing out a life of that statesman, with others belonging to the same period. It was more than in the air, so far as Browning was concerned, because his friend had been disabled, either through sickness or sorrow, from

finishing this volume by the appointed time, and he, as well he might, had largely helped him in its completion. It was, however, not till August 3 that Macready wrote in his diary: —

"Forster told me that Browning had fixed on Strafford for the subject of a tragedy; he could not have hit upon one that I could have more readily concurred in."

A previous entry of May 30, the occasion of which is only implied, shows with how high an estimate of Mr. Browning's intellectual importance Macready's professional relations to him began.

"Arriving at chambers, I found a note from Browning. What can I say upon it? It was a tribute which remunerated me for the annoyances and cares of years: it was one of the very highest, may I not say the highest, honor I have through life received."

The estimate maintained itself in reference to the value of Mr. Browning's work, since he wrote on March 13, 1837: —

"Read before dinner a few pages of 'Par-

acelsus,' which raises my wonder the more I read it. . . . Looked over two plays, which it was not possible to read, hardly as I tried. . . . Read some scenes in 'Strafford,' which restore one to the world of sense and feeling once again."

But as the day of the performance drew near, he became at once more anxious and more critical. An entry of April 28 comments somewhat sharply on the dramatic faults of "Strafford," besides declaring the writer's belief that the only chance for it is in the acting, which, "by possibility, might carry it to the end without disapprobation," though he dares not hope without opposition. It is quite conceivable that his first complete study of the play, and first rehearsal of it, brought to light deficiencies which had previously escaped him: but so complete a change of sentiment points also to private causes of uneasiness and irritation; and, perhaps, to the knowledge that its being saved by collective good acting was out of the question.

"Strafford" was performed at Covent Gar-

den Theatre on May 1. Mr. Browning wrote to Mr. Fox after one of the last rehearsals: —

May Day, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

DEAR SIR, — All my endeavors to procure a copy before this morning have been fruitless. I send the first book of the first bundle. *Pray* look over it — the alterations to-night will be considerable. The complexion of the piece is, I grieve to say, "perfect gallows" just now — our *king*, Mr. Dale, being . . . but you 'll see him, and, I fear, not much applaud.

Your unworthy son, in things literary,

ROBERT BROWNING.

P. S. [in pencil]. — A most unnecessary desire, but urged on me by Messrs. Longman: no notice on Str. in to-night's "True Sun," [1] lest the other papers be jealous ! ! !

A second letter, undated, but evidently written a day or two later, refers to the promised notice, which had then appeared.

[1] Mr. Fox reviewed *Strafford* in the *True Sun*.

Tuesday Night.

No words can express my feelings: I happen to be much annoyed and unwell — but your most generous notice has almost made "my soul well and happy now."

I thank you, my most kind, most constant friend, from my heart for your goodness — which is brave enough, just now.

I am ever and increasingly yours,

ROBERT BROWNING.

You will be glad to see me on the earliest occasion, will you not? I shall certainly come.

A letter from Miss Flower to Miss Sarah Fox (sister to the Rev. William Fox), at Norwich, contains the following passage, which evidently continues a chapter of London news: —

"Then 'Strafford;' were you not pleased to hear of the success of one you must, I think, remember a very little boy, years ago? If not, you have often heard us speak of Robert Browning: and it is a great deal to have ac-

complished a successful tragedy, although he seems a good deal annoyed at the go of things behind the scenes, and declares he will never write a play again, as long as he lives. You have no idea of the ignorance and obstinacy of the whole set, with here and there an exception; think of his having to write out the meaning of the word *impeachment*, as some of them thought it meant *poaching*."

On the first night, indeed, the fate of "Strafford" hung in the balance; it was saved by Macready and Miss Helen Faucit. After this they must have been better supported, as it was received on the second night with enthusiasm by a full house. The catastrophe came after the fifth performance, with the desertion of the actor who had sustained the part of Pym. We cannot now judge whether, even under favorable circumstances, the play would have had as long a run as was intended; but the casting vote in favor of this view is given by the conduct of Mr. Osbaldistone, the manager, when it was submitted to him. The diary says, March 30, that he caught at it with

avidity, and agreed to produce it without delay. The terms he offered to the author must also have been considered favorable in those days.

The play was published in April by Longman, this time not at the author's expense; but it brought no return either to him or to his publisher. It was dedicated "in all affectionate admiration" to William C. Macready.

We gain some personal glimpses of the Browning of 1835–36; one especially through Mrs. Bridell-Fox, who thus describes her first meeting with him: —

"I remember . . . when Mr. Browning entered the drawing-room, with a quick, light step; and on hearing from me that my father was out, and in fact that nobody was at home but myself, he said: 'It's my birthday to-day; I'll wait till they come in,' and sitting down to the piano, he added: 'If it won't disturb you, I'll play till they do.' And as he turned to the instrument, the bells of some neighboring church suddenly burst out with a frantic, merry peal. It seemed, to my childish fancy,

as if in response to the remark that it was his birthday. He was then slim and dark, and very handsome; and — may I hint it? — just a trifle of a dandy, addicted to lemon-colored kid gloves and such things: quite 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form.' But full of ambition, eager for success, eager for fame, and, what 's more, determined to conquer fame and to achieve success."

I do not think his memory ever taxed him with foppishness, though he may have had the innocent personal vanity of an attractive young man at his first period of much seeing and being seen; but all we know of him at that time bears out the impression Mrs. Fox conveys, of a joyous, artless confidence in himself and in life, easily depressed, but quickly reasserting itself; and in which the eagerness for new experiences had freed itself from the rebellious impatience of boyish days. The self-confidence had its touches of flippancy and conceit; but on this side it must have been constantly counteracted by his gratitude for kindness, and by his enthusiastic appreciation

of the merits of other men. His powers of feeling, indeed, greatly expended themselves in this way. He was very attractive to women, and, as we have seen, warmly loved by very various types of men; but, except in its poetic sense, his emotional nature was by no means then in the ascendant: a fact difficult to realize when we remember the passion of his childhood's love for mother and home, and the new and deep capabilities of affection to be developed in future days. The poet's soul in him was feeling its wings; the realities of life had not yet begun to weight them.

We see him again at the "Ion" supper, in the grace and modesty with which he received the honors then adjudged to him. The testimony has been said to come from Miss Mitford, but may easily have been supplied by Miss Haworth, who was also present on this occasion.

Mr. Browning's impulse towards play-writing had not, as we have seen, begun with "Strafford." It was still very far from being exhausted. And though he had struck out

for himself another line of dramatic activity, his love for the higher theatrical life, and the legitimate inducements of the more lucrative and not necessarily less noble form of composition, might ultimately in some degree have prevailed with him if circumstances had been such as to educate his theatrical capabilities, and to reward them. His first acted drama was, however, an interlude to the production of the important group of poems which was to be completed by "Sordello;" and he alludes to this later work in an also discarded preface to "Strafford," as one on which he had for some time been engaged. He even characterizes the tragedy as an attempt "to freshen a jaded mind by diverting it to the healthy natures of a grand epoch." "Sordello" again occupied him during the remainder of 1837 and the beginning of 1838; and by the spring of this year he must have been thankful to vary the scene and mode of his labors by means of a first visit to Italy. He announces his impending journey, with its immediate plan and purpose, in the following note: —

TO JOHN ROBERTSON, ESQ.

Good Friday, 1838.

DEAR SIR, — I was not fortunate enough to find you the day before yesterday; and must tell you very hurriedly that I sail this morning for Venice, — intending to finish my poem among the scenes it describes. I shall have your good wishes I know.

Believe me, in return, dear sir,

Yours faithfully and obliged,

ROBERT BROWNING.

Mr. John Robertson had influence with the "Westminster Review," either as editor or member of its staff. He had been introduced to Mr. Browning by Miss Martineau; and, being a great admirer of "Paracelsus," had promised careful attention for "Sordello;" but, when the time approached, he made conditions of early reading, etc., which Mr. Browning thought so unfair towards other magazines that he refused to fulfill them. He lost his review, and the goodwill of its intend-

ing writer; and even Miss Martineau was ever afterwards cooler towards him, though his attitude in the matter had been in some degree prompted by a chivalrous partisanship for her.

CHAPTER VII.

1838–1841.

First Italian Journey. — Letters to Miss Haworth. — Mr. John Kenyon. — "Sordello." — Letter to Miss Flower. — "Pippa Passes." — "Bells and Pomegranates."

Mr. Browning sailed from London with Captain Davidson of the Norham Castle, a merchant vessel bound for Trieste, on which he found himself the only passenger. A striking experience of the voyage, and some characteristic personal details, are given in the following letter to Miss Haworth. It is dated 1838, and was probably written before that year's summer had closed.

Tuesday Evening.

Dear Miss Haworth, — Do look at a fuchsia in full bloom, and notice the clear little honey-drop depending from every flower. I have just found it out to my no small satis-

faction, — a bee's breakfast. I only answer for the long-blossomed sort, though, — indeed, for this plant in my room. Taste and be Titania; you can, that is. All this while I forget that you will, perhaps, never guess the good of the discovery: I have, you are to know, such a love for flowers and leaves — some leaves — that I every now and then, in an impatience at being able to possess myself of them thoroughly, to see them quite, satiate myself with their scent, — bite them to bits, — so there will be some sense in that. How I remember the flowers — even grasses — of places I have seen! Some one flower or weed, I should say, that gets some strangehow connected with them.

Snowdrops and Tilsit in Prussia go together; cowslips and Windsor Park, for instance; flowering palm and some place or other in Holland.

Now to answer what can be answered in the letter I was happy to receive last week. I am quite well. I did not expect you would write, — for none of your written reasons, however.

You will see "Sordello" in a trice, if the fagging fit holds. I did not write six lines while absent (except a scene in a play, jotted down as we sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar) — but I did hammer out some four, two of which are addressed to you, two to the Queen[1] — the whole to go in Book III. — perhaps. I called you "Eyebright" — meaning a simple and sad sort of translation of "Euphrasia" into my own language: folks would know who Euphrasia, or Fanny, was — and I should not know Ianthe or Clemanthe. Not that there is anything in them to care for, good or bad. Shall I say "Eyebright"?

I was disappointed in one thing, Canova.

What companions should I have?

The story of the ship must have reached you "with a difference," as Ophelia says; my sister told it to a Mr. Dow, who delivered it to Forster, I suppose, who furnished Macready with it, who made it over, etc., etc., etc. As short as I can tell, this way it happened: the

[1] I know no passage which contains any allusion to the Queen.

captain woke me one bright Sunday morning to say there was a ship floating keel uppermost half a mile off; they lowered a boat, made ropes fast to some floating canvas, and towed her towards our vessel. Both met halfway, and the little air that had risen an hour or two before sank at once. Our men made the wreck fast in high glee at having "new trousers out of the sails," and quite sure she was a French boat, broken from her moorings at Algiers, close by. Ropes were next hove (hang this sea-talk!) round her stanchions, and after a quarter of an hour's pushing at the capstan, the vessel righted suddenly, one dead body floating out; five more were in the forecastle, and had probably been there a month under a blazing African sun — don't imagine the wretched state of things. They were, these six, the "watch below" — (I give you the result of the day's observation) — the rest, some eight or ten, had been washed overboard at first. One or two were Algerines, the rest Spaniards. The vessel was a smuggler bound for Gibraltar; there were two stupidly dispro-

portionate guns, taking up the whole deck, which was convex and — nay, look you! [a rough pen-and-ink sketch of the different parts of the wreck is here introduced] these are the gun-rings, and the black square the place where the bodies lay. (All the "bulwarks," or sides of the top, carried away by the waves.) Well, the sailors covered up the hatchway, broke up the aft-deck, hauled up tobacco and cigars, such heaps of them, and then bale after bale of prints and chintz, don't you call it, till the captain was half frightened — he would get at the ship's papers, he said; so these poor fellows were pulled up, piecemeal, and pitched into the sea, the very sailors calling to each other to "cover the faces," — no papers of importance were found, however, but fifteen swords, powder and ball enough for a dozen such boats, and bundles of cotton, etc., that would have taken a day to get out; but the captain vowed that after five o'clock she should be cut adrift: accordingly she was cast loose, not a third of her cargo having been touched; and you hardly can conceive the

strange sight when the battered hulk turned round, actually, and looked at us, and then reeled off, like a mutilated creature from some scoundrel French surgeon's lecture-table, into the most gorgeous and lavish sunset in the world: there; only thank me for not taking you at your word, and giving you the whole "story." "What I did?" I went to Trieste, then Venice — then through Treviso and Bassano to the mountains, delicious Asolo, all my places and castles, you will see. Then to Vicenza, Padua, and Venice again. Then to Verona, Trent, Innspruck (the Tyrol), Munich, Salzburg in Franconia, Frankfort and Mayence; down the Rhine to Cologne, then to Aix-la-Chapelle, Liège, and Antwerp; then home. Shall you come to town, anywhere near town, soon? I shall be off again as soon as my book is out, whenever that will be.

I never read that book of Miss Martineau's, so can't understand what you mean. Macready is looking well; I just saw him the other day for a minute after the play; his Kitely was Kitely — superb from his flat cap

down to his shining shoes. I saw very few Italians, "to know," that is. Those I did see I liked. Your friend Pepoli has been lecturing here, has he not?

I shall be vexed if you don't write soon, a long Elstree letter. What are you doing, writing — drawing? Ever yours truly,

R. B.

To Miss Haworth,
Barham Lodge, Elstree.

Miss Browning's account of this experience, supplied from memory of her brother's letters and conversations, contains some vivid supplementary details. The drifting away of the wreck put probably no effective distance between it and the ship; hence the necessity of "sailing away" from it.

"Of the dead pirates, one had his hands clasped as if praying; another, a severe gash in his head. The captain burnt disinfectants and blew gunpowder, before venturing on board, but even then, he, a powerful man, turned very sick with the smell and sight. They stayed one whole day by the side, but

the sailors, in spite of orders, began to plunder the cigars, etc. The captain said privately to Robert, 'I cannot restrain my men, and they will bring the plague into our ship, so I mean quietly in the night to sail away.' Robert took two cutlasses and a dagger; they were of the coarsest workmanship, intended for use. At the end of one of the sheaths was a heavy bullet, so that it could be used as a sling. The day after, to their great relief, a heavy rain fell and cleansed the ship. Captain Davidson reported the sight of the wreck and its condition as soon as he arrived at Trieste."

Miss Browning also relates that the weather was stormy in the Bay of Biscay, and for the first fortnight her brother suffered terribly. The captain supported him on to the deck as they passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, that he might not lose the sight. He recovered, as we know, sufficiently to write "How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix;" but we can imagine in what revulsion of feeling towards firm land and healthy mo-

tion this dream of a headlong gallop was born in him. The poem was penciled on the cover of Bartoli's "De' Simboli trasportati al Morale," a favorite book and constant companion of his; and, in spite of perfect effacement as far as the sense goes, the pencil dints are still visible. The little poem "Home Thoughts from the Sea" was written at the same time, and in the same manner.

By the time they reached Trieste, the captain, a rough north-countryman, had become so attached to Mr. Browning that he offered him a free passage to Constantinople; and after they had parted, carefully preserved, by way of remembrance, a pair of very old gloves worn by him on deck. Mr. Browning might, on such an occasion, have dispensed with gloves altogether; but it was one of his peculiarities that he could never endure to be out of doors with uncovered hands. The captain also showed his friendly feeling on his return to England by bringing to Miss Browning, whom he had heard of through her brother, a present of six bottles of attar of roses.

The inspirations of Asolo and Venice appear in "Pippa Passes" and "In a Gondola;" but the latter poem showed, to Mr. Browning's subsequent vexation, that Venice had been imperfectly seen; and the magnetism which Asolo was to exercise upon him only fully asserted itself at a much later time.

A second letter to Miss Haworth is undated, but may have been written at any period of this or the ensuing year.

"I have received, a couple of weeks since, a present — an album large and gaping, and as Cibber's Richard says of the 'fair Elizabeth:' 'My heart is empty — she shall fill it' — so say I (impudently?) of my grand trouble-table, which holds a sketch or two by my fine fellow Monclar, one lithograph — his own face of faces, — 'all the rest was amethyst.' F. H. everywhere! not a soul beside 'in the crystal silence there,' and it locks, this album; now, don't shower drawings on M., who has so many advantages over me as it is: or at least don't bid *me* of all others say what he is to have.

"The 'Master' is somebody you don't know, W. J. Fox, a magnificent and poetical nature, who used to write in reviews when I was a boy, and to whom my verses, a bookful, written at the ripe age of twelve and thirteen, were shown: which verses he praised not a little; which praise comforted me not a little. Then I lost sight of him for years and years; then I published *anonymously* a little poem, which he, to my inexpressible delight, praised and expounded in a gallant article in a magazine of which he was the editor; then I found him out again; he got a publisher for 'Paracelsus' (I read it to him in manuscript) and is in short 'my literary father.' Pretty nearly the same thing did he for Miss Martineau, as she has said somewhere. God knows I forget what the 'talk,' table-talk was about — I think she must have told you the results of the whole day we spent *tête-à-tête* at Ascot, and that day's, the dinner-day's morning at Elstree and St. Albans. She is to give me advice about my worldly concerns, and not before I need it!

"I cannot say or sing the pleasure your way of writing gives me — do go on, and tell me all sorts of things, 'the story' for a beginning; but your moralizings on 'your age' and the rest, are — now what *are* they? not to be reasoned on, disputed, laughed at, grieved about: they are 'Fanny's crotchets.' I thank thee, Jew(lia), for teaching me that word.

"I don't know that I shall leave town for a month: my friend Monclar looks piteous when I talk of such an event. I can't bear to leave him; he is to take my portrait to-day (a famous one he *has* taken!) and very like he engages it shall be. I am going to town for the purpose. . . .

"Now, then, do something for me, and see if I'll ask Miss M—— to help you! I am going to begin the finishing 'Sordello' — and to begin thinking a Tragedy (an Historical one, so I shall want heaps of criticisms on 'Strafford'), and I want to have *another* tragedy in prospect, I write best so provided: I had chosen a splendid subject for it, when I

learned that a magazine for next, this, month, will have a scene founded on my story; vulgarizing or doing no good to it: and I accordingly throw it up. I want a subject of the most wild and passionate love, to contrast with the one I mean to have ready in a short time. I have many half-conceptions, floating fancies: give me your notion of a thorough self-devotement, self-forgetting; should it be a woman who loves thus, or a man? What circumstances will best draw out, set forth, this feeling?" . . .

The tragedies in question were to be "King Victor and King Charles," and "The Return of the Druses."

This letter affords a curious insight into Mr. Browning's mode of work; it is also very significant of the small place which love had hitherto occupied in his life. It was evident, from his appeal to Miss Haworth's "notion" on the subject, that he had as yet no experience, even imaginary, of a genuine passion, whether in woman or man. The experience was still distant from him in point of time.

In circumstance he was nearer to it than he knew; for it was in 1839 that he became acquainted with Mr. Kenyon.

When dining one day at Serjeant Talfourd's, he was accosted by a pleasant elderly man, who, having, we conclude, heard who he was, asked leave to address to him a few questions: "Was his father's name Robert? had he gone to school at the Rev. Mr. Bell's at Cheshunt, and was he still alive?" On receiving affirmative answers, he went on to say that Mr. Browning and he had been great chums at school, and though they had lost sight of each other in after-life, he had never forgotten his old playmate, but even alluded to him in a little book which he had published a few years before.[1]

The next morning the poet asked his father if he remembered a schoolfellow named John Kenyon. He replied, "Certainly! This is his face," and sketched a boy's head, in which

[1] The volume is entitled *Rhymed Plea for Tolerance* (1833), and contains a reference to Mr. Kenyon's schooldays, and to the classic fights which Mr. Browning had instituted.

his son at once recognized that of the grown man. The acquaintance was renewed, and Mr. Kenyon proved ever afterwards a warm friend. Mr. Browning wrote of him, in a letter to Professor Knight of St. Andrews, January 10, 1884: "He was one of the best of human beings, with a general sympathy for excellence of every kind. He enjoyed the friendship of Wordsworth, of Southey, of Landor, and, in later days, was intimate with most of my contemporaries of eminence." It was at Mr. Kenyon's house that the poet saw most of Wordsworth, who always stayed there when he came to town.

In 1840 "Sordello" appeared. It was, relatively to its length, by far the slowest in preparation of Mr. Browning's poems. This seemed, indeed, a condition of its peculiar character. It had lain much deeper in the author's mind than the various slighter works which were thrown off in the course of its inception. We know from the preface to "Strafford" that it must have been begun soon after "Paracelsus." Its plan may have

belonged to a still earlier date; for it connects itself with "Pauline" as the history of a poetic soul; with both the earlier poems, as the manifestation of the self-conscious spiritual ambitions which were involved in that history. This first imaginative mood was also outgrowing itself in the very act of self-expression; for the tragedies written before the conclusion of "Sordello" impress us as the product of a different mental state, — as the work of a more balanced imagination and a more mature mind.

It would be interesting to learn how Mr. Browning's typical poet became embodied in this mediæval form: whether the half-mythical character of the real Sordello presented him as a fitting subject for imaginative psychological treatment, or whether the circumstances among which he moved seemed the best adapted to the development of the intended type. The inspiration may have come through the study of Dante, and his testimony to the creative influence of Sordello on their mother-tongue. That period of Italian his-

tory must also have assumed, if it did not already possess, a great charm for Mr. Browning's fancy, since he studied no less than thirty works upon it, which were to contribute little more to his dramatic picture than what he calls "decoration" or "background." But the one guide which he has given us to the reading of the poem is his assertion that its historical circumstance is only to be regarded as background; and the extent to which he identified himself with the figure of Sordello has been proved by his continued belief that its prominence was throughout maintained. He could still declare, so late as 1863, in his preface to the reprint of the work, that his *stress* in writing it had lain *on the incidents in the development of a soul, little else* being, to his mind, *worth study*. I cannot, therefore, help thinking that recent investigations of the life and character of the actual poet, however in themselves praiseworthy and interesting, have been often, in some degree, a mistake; because, directly or indirectly, they referred Mr. Browning's Sordello to an his-

torical reality, which his author had grasped, as far as was then possible, but to which he was never intended to conform.

Sordello's story does exhibit the development of a soul; or, rather, the sudden awakening of a self-regarding nature to the claims of other men, — the sudden, though slowly prepared, expansion of the narrower into the larger self, the selfish into the sympathetic existence; and this takes place in accordance with Mr. Browning's here expressed belief that poetry is the appointed vehicle for all lasting truths; that the true poet must be their exponent. The work is thus obviously, in point of moral utterance, an advance on "Pauline." Its metaphysics are, also, more distinctly formulated than those of either "Pauline" or "Paracelsus;" and the frequent use of the term Will in its metaphysical sense so strongly points to German associations that it is difficult to realize their absence, then and always, from Mr. Browning's mind. But he was emphatic in his assurance that he knew neither the German philosophers

nor their reflection in Coleridge, who would have seemed a likely medium between them and him. Miss Martineau once said to him that he had no need to study German thought, since his mind was German enough — by which she possibly meant too German — already.

The poem also impresses us by a Gothic richness of detail,[1] the picturesque counterpart of its intricacy of thought, and, perhaps for this very reason, never so fully displayed in any subsequent work. Mr. Browning's genuinely modest attitude towards it could not preclude the consciousness of the many imaginative beauties which its unpopular character had served to conceal; and he was glad to find, some years ago, that "Sordello" was represented in a collection of descriptive passages which a friend of his was proposing to

[1] The term Gothic has been applied to Mr. Browning's work, I believe, by Mr. James Thomson, in writing of *The Ring and the Book*, and I do not like to use it without saying so. But it is one of those which must have spontaneously suggested themselves to many other of Mr. Browning's readers.

make. "There is a great deal of that in it," he said, "and it has always been overlooked."

It was unfortunate that new difficulties of style should have added themselves on this occasion to those of subject and treatment; and the reason of it is not generally known. Mr. John Sterling had made some comments on the wording of "Paracelsus;" and Miss Caroline Fox, then quite a young woman, repeated them, with additions, to Miss Haworth, who, in her turn, communicated them to Mr. Browning, but without making quite clear to him the source from which they sprang. He took the criticism much more seriously than it deserved, and condensed the language of this his next important publication into what was nearly its present form.

In leaving "Sordello" we emerge from the self-conscious stage of Mr. Browning's imagination, and his work ceases to be autobiographic in the sense in which, perhaps erroneously, we have hitherto felt it to be. "Festus" and "Salinguerra" have already given promise of the world of "Men and Women" into

which he will now conduct us. They will be inspired by every variety of conscious motive, but never again by the old (real or imagined) self-centred, self-directing Will. We have, indeed, already lost the sense of disparity between the man and the poet; for the Browning of "Sordello" was growing older, while the defects of the poem were in many respects those of youth. In "Pippa Passes," published one year later, the poet and the man show themselves full-grown. Each has entered on the inheritance of the other.

Neither the imagination nor the passion of what Mr. Gosse so fitly calls this "lyrical masque"[1] gives much scope for tenderness; but the quality of humor is displayed in it for the first time; as also a strongly marked philosophy of life — or more properly, of association — from which its idea and development are derived. In spite, however, of these evidences of general maturity, Mr. Browning was still sometimes boyish in personal inter-

[1] These words, and a subsequent paragraph, are quoted from Mr. Gosse's *Personalia*.

course, if we may judge from a letter to Miss Flower written at about the same time.

Monday night, *March* 9 (? 1841).

My dear Miss Flower, — I have this moment received your very kind note — of course I understand your objections. How else? But they are somewhat lightened already (confess — nay "confess" is vile — you will be rejoiced to holla from the house-top) — will go on, or rather go off, lightening, and will be — oh, where *will* they be half a dozen years hence?

Meantime praise what you can praise, do me all the good you can, you and Mr. Fox (as if you will not!), for I have a head full of projects — mean to song-write, play-write forthwith, — and, believe me, dear Miss Flower,

Yours ever faithfully,

Robert Browning.

By the way, you speak of "Pippa" — could we not make some arrangement about it? The lyrics *want* your music — five or six in all —

how say you? When these three plays are out I hope to build a huge Ode — but "all goeth by God's Will."

The loyal Alfred Domett now appears on the scene with a satirical poem, inspired by an impertinent criticism on his friend. I give its first two verses: —

ON A CERTAIN CRITIQUE ON "PIPPA PASSES."

(*Query — Passes what? — the critic's comprehension.*)

Ho! every one that by the nose is led,
Automatons of which the world is full,
Ye myriad bodies, each without a head,
That dangle from a critic's brainless skull,
Come, hearken to a deep discovery made,
A mighty truth now wondrously displayed.

A black squat beetle, vigorous for his size,
Pushing tail-first by every road that 's wrong
The dung-ball of his dirty thoughts along
His tiny sphere of groveling sympathies —
Has knocked himself full-butt, with blundering trouble,
Against a mountain he can neither double
Nor ever hope to scale. So like a free,
Pert, self-conceited scarabæus, he
Takes it into his horny head to swear
There 's no such thing as any mountain there.

The writer lived to do better things from a literary point of view; but these lines have a fine ring of youthful indignation which must have made them a welcome tribute to friendship.

There seems to have been little respectful criticism of "Pippa Passes;" it is less surprising that there should have been very little of "Sordello." Mr. Browning, it is true, retained a limited number of earnest appreciators, foremost of whom was the writer of an admirable notice of these two works, quoted from an "Eclectic Review" of 1847, in Dr. Furnivall's "Bibliography." I am also told that the series of poems which was next to appear was enthusiastically greeted by some poets and painters of the pre-Raphaelite school; but he was now entering on a period of general neglect, which covered nearly twenty years of his life, and much that has since become most deservedly popular in his work.

"Pippa Passes" had appeared as the first installment of "Bells and Pomegranates," the

history of which I give in Mr. Gosse's words. This poem, and the two tragedies, "King Victor and King Charles" and "The Return of the Druses," — first christened "Mansoor, the Hierophant," — were lying idle in Mr. Browning's desk. He had not found, perhaps not very vigorously sought, a publisher for them.

"One day, as the poet was discussing the matter with Mr. Edward Moxon, the publisher, the latter remarked that at that time he was bringing out some editions of the old Elizabethan dramatists in a comparatively cheap form, and that if Mr. Browning would consent to print his poems as pamphlets, using this cheap type, the expense would be very inconsiderable. The poet jumped at the idea, and it was agreed that each poem should form a separate brochure of just one sheet — sixteen pages in double columns — the entire cost of which should not exceed twelve or fifteen pounds. In this fashion began the celebrated series of "Bells and Pomegranates," eight numbers of which, a perfect treasury of

fine poetry, came out successively between 1841 and 1846. "Pippa Passes" led the way, and was priced first at sixpence; then, the sale being inconsiderable, at a shilling, which greatly encouraged the sale; and so, slowly, up to half-a-crown, at which the price of each number finally rested."

Mr. Browning's hopes and intentions with respect to this series are announced in the following preface to "Pippa Passes," of which, in later editions, only the dedicatory words appear: —

"Two or three years ago I wrote a Play, about which the chief matter I much care to recollect at present is, that a Pit-full of good-natured people applauded it: — ever since, I have been desirous of doing something in the same way that should better reward their attention. What follows I mean for the first of a series of Dramatical Pieces, to come out at intervals, and I amuse myself by fancying that the cheap mode in which they appear will for once help me to a sort of Pit-audience again. Of course, such a work must go on

no longer than it is liked; and to provide against a certain and but too possible contingency, let me hasten to say now — what, if I were sure of success, I would try to say circumstantially enough at the close — that I dedicate my best intentions most admiringly to the author of 'Ion' — most affectionately to Serjeant Talfourd."

A necessary explanation of the general title was reserved for the last number: and does something towards justifying the popular impression that Mr. Browning exacted a large measure of literary insight from his readers.

"Here ends my first series of 'Bells and Pomegranates:' and I take the opportunity of explaining, in reply to inquiries, that I only meant by that title to indicate an endeavor towards something like an alternation, or mixture, of music with discoursing, sound with sense, poetry with thought; which looks too ambitious, thus expressed, so the symbol was preferred. It is little to the purpose, that such is actually one of the most familiar of the many Rabbinical (and Patristic) accepta-

tions of the phrase; because I confess that, letting authority alone, I supposed the bare words, in such juxtaposition, would sufficiently convey the desired meaning. 'Faith and good works' is another fancy, for instance, and perhaps no easier to arrive at; yet Giotto placed a pomegranate fruit in the hand of Dante, and Raffaelle crowned his Theology (in the *Camera della Segnatura*) with blossoms of the same; as if the Bellari and Vasari would be sure to come after, and explain that it was merely '*simbolo delle buone opere — il qual Pomo granato fu però usato nelle vesti del Pontefice appresso gli Ebrei.*'"

The Dramas and Poems contained in the eight numbers of "Bells and Pomegranates" were: —

I. Pippa Passes. 1841.
II. King Victor and King Charles. 1842.
III. Dramatic Lyrics. 1842.
Cavalier Tunes; I. Marching Along; II. Give a Rouse; III. My Wife Gertrude. ["Boot and Saddle."]

Italy and France; I. Italy; II. France.

Camp and Cloister; I. Camp (*French*); II. Cloister (*Spanish*).

In a Gondola.

Artemis Prologizes.

Waring; I., II.

Queen Worship; I. Rudel and the Lady of Tripoli; II. Cristina.

Madhouse Cells; I. [Johannes Agricola.] II. [Porphyria.]

Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr. 1842.

The Pied Piper of Hamelin; a Child's Story.

IV. The Return of the Druses. A Tragedy, in Five Acts. 1843.

V. A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. A Tragedy, in Three Acts. 1843. [Second Edition, same year.]

VI. Colombe's Birthday. A Play, in Five Acts. 1844.

VII. Dramatic Romances and Lyrics. 1845.

How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix. (16—.)

Pictor Ignotus. (*Florence*, 15—.)

Italy in England.

England in Italy. (*Piano di Sorrento.*)

The Lost Leader.

The Lost Mistress.
Home Thoughts, from Abroad.
The Tomb at St. Praxed's. (*Rome*, 15—.)
Garden Fancies; I. The Flower's Name; II. Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis.
France and Spain; I. The Laboratory (*Ancien Régime*); II. Spain — The Confessional.
The Flight of the Duchess.
Earth's Immortalities.
Song. ("Nay but you, who do not love her.")
The Boy and the Angel.
Night and Morning; I. Night; II. Morning.
Claret and Tokay.
Saul. (Part I.)
Time's Revenges.
The Glove. (PETER RONSARD *loquitur*.)

VIII. and last. Luria; and A Soul's Tragedy. 1846.

This publication has seemed entitled to a detailed notice, because it is practically extinct, and because its nature and circumstance confer on it a biographical interest not possessed by any subsequent issue of Mr. Browning's works. The dramas and poems of which

it is composed belong to that more mature period of the author's life, in which the analysis of his work ceases to form a necessary part of his history. Some few of them, however, are significant to it; and this is notably the case with "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon."

CHAPTER VIII.

1841–1844.

"A Blot in the 'Scutcheon." — Letters to Mr. Frank Hill; Lady Martin. — Charles Dickens. — Other Dramas and Minor Poems. — Letters to Miss Lee; Miss Haworth; Miss Flower. — Second Italian Journey; Naples. — E. J. Trelawney. — Stendhal.

"A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" was written for Macready, who meant to perform the principal part; and we may conclude that the appeal for it was urgent, since it was composed in the space of four or five days. Macready's journals must have contained a fuller reference to both the play and its performance (at Drury Lane, February, 1843) than appears in published form; but considerable irritation had arisen between him and Mr. Browning, and he possibly wrote something which his editor, Sir Frederick Pollock, as the friend of both, thought it best to omit. What occurred

on this occasion has been told in some detail by Mr. Gosse, and would not need repeating if the question were only of re-telling it on the same authority, in another person's words; but, through the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hill, I am able to give Mr. Browning's direct statement of the case, as also his expressed judgment upon it. The statement was made more than forty years later than the events to which it refers, but will, nevertheless, be best given in its direct connection with them.

The merits, or demerits, of "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" had been freshly brought under discussion by its performance in London through the action of the Browning Society, and in Washington by Mr. Lawrence Barrett; and it became the subject of a paragraph in one of the theatrical articles prepared for the "Daily News." Mr. Hill was then editor of the paper, and when the article came to him for revision, he thought it right to submit to Mr. Browning the passages devoted to his tragedy, which embodied some then prevail-

ing, but, he strongly suspected, erroneous impressions concerning it. The results of this kind and courteous proceeding appear in the following letter.

19 Warwick Crescent, *December* 15, 1884.

My dear Mr. Hill, — It was kind and considerate of you to suppress the paragraph which you send me, — and of which the publication would have been unpleasant for reasons quite other than as regarding my own work, — which exists to defend or accuse itself. You will judge of the true reasons when I tell you the facts — so much of them as contradicts the statements of your critic — who, I suppose, has received a stimulus from the notice, in an American paper which arrived last week, of Mr. Lawrence Barrett's intention "shortly to produce the play" in New York — and subsequently in London: so that "the failure" of forty-one years ago might be duly influential at present — or two years hence, perhaps. The "mere amateurs" are no high game.

Macready received and accepted the play, while he was engaged at the Haymarket, and retained it for Drury Lane, of which I was ignorant that he was about to become the manager: he accepted it "at the instigation" of nobody, — and Charles Dickens was not in England when he did so: it was read to him after his return, by Forster — and the glowing letter which contains his opinion of it, although directed by him to be shown to myself, was never heard of nor seen by me till printed in Forster's book some thirty years after. When the Drury Lane season began, Macready informed me that he should act the play when he had brought out two others — "The Patrician's Daughter," and "Plighted Troth:" having done so, he wrote to me that the former had been unsuccessful in money-drawing, and the latter had "smashed his arrangements altogether:" but he would still produce my play. I had — in my ignorance of certain symptoms better understood by Macready's professional acquaintances — I had no notion that it was a proper thing, in such a case, to

"release him from his promise;" on the contrary, I should have fancied that such a proposal was offensive. Soon after, Macready begged that I would call on him: he said the play had been read to the actors the day before, "and laughed at from beginning to end:" on my speaking my mind about this, he explained that the reading had been done by the Prompter, a grotesque person with a red nose and wooden leg, ill at ease in the love scenes, and that he would himself make amends by reading the play next morning — which he did, and very adequately — but apprised me that, in consequence of the state of his mind, harassed by business and various trouble, the principal character must be taken by Mr. Phelps; and again I failed to understand, — what Forster subsequently assured me was plain as the sun at noonday, — that to allow at Macready's Theatre any other than Macready to play the principal part in a new piece was suicidal, — and really believed I was meeting his exigencies by accepting the substitution. At the rehearsal, Macready announced

that Mr. Phelps was ill, and that he himself would read the part: on the third rehearsal, Mr. Phelps appeared for the first time, and sat in a chair while Macready more than read, rehearsed the part. The next morning Mr. Phelps waylaid me at the stage-door to say, with much emotion, that it never was intended that *he* should be instrumental in the success of a new tragedy, and that Macready would play Tresham on the ground that himself, Phelps, was unable to do so. He added that he could not expect me to waive such an advantage, — but that, if I were prepared to waive it, "he would take ether, sit up all night, and have the words in his memory by next day." I bade him follow me to the green-room, and hear what I decided upon — which was that as Macready had given him the part, he should keep it: this was on a Thursday; he rehearsed on Friday and Saturday, — the play being acted the same evening, — *of the fifth day after the "reading" by Macready.* Macready at once wished to reduce the importance of the "play" — as he styled it in the

bills, — tried to leave out so much of the text, that I baffled him by getting it printed in four-and-twenty hours, by Moxon's assistance. He wanted me to call it "The Sister"! — and I have before me, while I write, the stage-acting copy, with two lines of his own insertion to avoid the tragical ending — Tresham was to announce his intention of going into a monastery! all this, to keep up the belief that Macready, and Macready alone, could produce a veritable "tragedy," unproduced before. Not a shilling was spent on scenery or dresses — and a striking scene which had been used for the "Patrician's Daughter" did duty a second time. If your critic considers this treatment of the play an instance of "the failure of powerful and experienced actors" to insure its success, — I can only say that my own opinion was shown by at once breaking off a friendship of many years — a friendship which had a right to be plainly and simply told that the play I had contributed as a proof of it would, through a change of circumstances, no longer be to my friend's

advantage, — all I could possibly care for. Only recently, when by the publication of Macready's journals the extent of his pecuniary embarrassments at that time was made known, could I in a measure understand his motives for such conduct — and less than ever understand why he so strangely disguised and disfigured them. If "applause" means success, the play thus maimed and maltreated was successful enough: it "made way" for Macready's own Benefit, and the theatre closed a fortnight after.

Having kept silence for all these years, in spite of repeated explanations, in the style of your critic's, that the play "failed in spite of the best endeavors," etc., I hardly wish to revive a very painful matter: on the other hand, — as I have said, my play subsists, and is as open to praise or blame as it was forty-one years ago: is it necessary to search out what somebody or other, — not improbably a jealous adherent of Macready, "the only organizer of theatrical victories," chose to say on the subject? If the characters are "abhor-

rent" and "inscrutable" — and the language conformable, — they were so when Dickens pronounced upon them, and will be so whenever the critic pleases to reconsider them — which, if he ever has an opportunity of doing, apart from the printed copy, I can assure you is through no motion of mine. This particular experience was sufficient: but the Play is out of my power now; though amateurs and actors may do what they please.

Of course, this being the true story, I should desire that it were told *thus* and no otherwise, if it must be told at all: but *not* as a statement of mine, — the substance of it has been partly stated already by more than one qualified person, and if I have been willing to let the poor matter drop, surely there is no need that it should be gone into now when Macready and his Athenæum upholder are no longer able to speak for themselves: this is just a word to you, dear Mr. Hill, and may be brought under the notice of your critic if you think proper — but only for the facts — not as a communication for the public.

Yes, thank you, I am in full health, as you wish — and I wish you and Mrs. Hill, I assure you, all the good appropriate to the season. My sister has completely recovered from her illness, and is grateful for your inquiries.

With best regards to Mrs. Hill, and an apology for this long letter, which, however, — when once induced to write it, — I could not well shorten, — believe me,

Yours truly ever,

ROBERT BROWNING.

I well remember Mr. Browning's telling me how, when he returned to the green-room, on that critical day, he drove his hat more firmly on to his head, and said to Macready, "I beg pardon, sir, but you have given the part to Mr. Phelps, and I am satisfied that he should act it;" and how Macready, on hearing this, crushed up the MS., and flung it on to the ground. He also admitted that his own manner had been provocative; but he was indignant at what he deemed the unjust treatment which Mr. Phelps had received. The occasion of the next letter speaks for itself.

December 21, 1884.

My dear Mr. Hill, — Your goodness must extend to letting me have the last word — one of sincere thanks. You cannot suppose I doubted for a moment of a goodwill which I have had abundant proof of. I only took the occasion your considerate letter gave me, to tell the simple truth which my forty years' silence is a sign I would only tell on compulsion. I never thought your critic had any less generous motive for alluding to the performance as he did than that which he professes: he doubtless heard the account of the matter which Macready and his intimates gave currency to at the time; and which, being confined for a while to their limited number, I never chose to notice. But of late years I have got to *read* — not merely *hear* — of the play's failure, "which all the efforts of my friend the great actor could not avert;" and the nonsense of this untruth gets hard to bear. I told you the principal facts in the letter I very hastily wrote: I could, had it been worth while, corroborate them by others

in plenty, and refer to the living witnesses — Lady Martin, Mrs. Stirling, and (I believe) Mr. Anderson: it was solely through the admirable loyalty of the two former that . . . a play . . . deprived of every advantage, in the way of scenery, dresses, and rehearsing — proved — what Macready himself declared it to be — "a complete success." *So* he sent a servant to tell me, "in case there was a call for the author at the end of the act" — to which I replied that the author had been too sick and sorry at the whole treatment of his play to do any such thing. Such a call there truly *was*, and Mr. Anderson had to come forward and "beg the author to come forward if he were in the house — a circumstance of which he was not aware:" whereat the author laughed at him from a box just opposite. . . . I would submit to anybody drawing a conclusion from one or two facts past contradiction, whether that play could have thoroughly failed which was not only not withdrawn at once but acted three nights in the same week, and, years afterwards, reproduced in his own theatre,

during my absence in Italy, by Mr. Phelps — the person most completely aware of the untoward circumstances which stood originally in the way of success. Why not inquire how it happens that, this second time, there was no doubt of the play's doing as well as plays ordinarily do? for those were not the days of a "run."

. . . . . .

. . . This "last word" has indeed been an Aristophanic one of fifty syllables: but I have spoken it, relieved myself, and commend all that concerns me to the approved and valued friend of whom I am proud to account myself in corresponding friendship,

His truly ever,

ROBERT BROWNING.

Mr. Browning also alludes to Mr. Phelps's acting as not only not having been detrimental to the play, but having helped to save it, in the conspiracy of circumstances which seemed to invoke its failure. This was a mistake, since Macready had been anxious to resume

the part, and would have saved it, to say the least, more thoroughly. It must, however, be remembered that the irritation which these letters express was due much less to the nature of the facts recorded in them than to the manner in which they had been brought before Mr. Browning's mind. Writing on the subject to Lady Martin in February, 1881, he had spoken very temperately of Macready's treatment of his play, while deprecating the injustice towards his own friendship which its want of frankness involved: and many years before this, the touch of a common sorrow had caused the old feeling, at least momentarily, to well up again. The two met for the first time after these occurrences when Mr. Browning had returned, a widower, from Italy. Mr. Macready, too, had recently lost his wife; and Mr. Browning could only start forward, grasp the hand of his old friend, and in a voice choked with emotion say, "O Macready!"

Lady Martin has spoken to me of the poet's attitude on the occasion of this performance

as being full of generous sympathy for those who were working with him, as well as of the natural anxiety of a young author for his own success. She also remains convinced that this sympathy led him rather to over- than to under-rate the support he received. She wrote concerning it in "Blackwood's Magazine," March, 1881: —

"It seems but yesterday that I sat by his [Mr. Elton's] side in the green-room at the reading of Robert Browning's beautiful drama, 'A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.' As a rule Mr. Macready always read the new plays. But owing, I suppose, to some press of business, the task was intrusted on this occasion to the head prompter, — a clever man in his way, but wholly unfitted to bring out, or even to understand, Mr. Browning's meaning. Consequently, the delicate, subtle lines were twisted, perverted, and sometimes even made ridiculous in his hands. My 'cruel father' [Mr. Elton] was a warm admirer of the poet. He sat writhing and indignant, and tried by gentle asides to make me see the real meaning of the

verse. But somehow the mischief proved irreparable, for a few of the actors during the rehearsals chose to continue to misunderstand the text, and never took the interest in the play which they would have done had Mr. Macready read it."

Looking back on the first appearance of his tragedy through the widening perspectives of nearly forty years, Mr. Browning might well declare as he did in the letter to Lady Martin to which I have just referred, that her "*perfect* behavior as a woman" and her "admirable playing as an actress" had been (or at all events were) to him "the one gratifying circumstance connected with it."

He also felt it a just cause of bitterness that the letter from Charles Dickens,[1] which conveyed his almost passionate admiration of "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," and was clearly written to Mr. Forster in order that it might be seen, was withheld for thirty years from his knowledge, and that of the public whose judgment it might so largely have influenced. Nor

[1] See Forster's *Life of Dickens*.

was this the only time in the poet's life that fairly earned honors escaped him.

"Colombe's Birthday" was produced in 1853 at the Haymarket;[1] and afterwards in the provinces, under the direction of Miss Helen Faucit, who created the principal part. It was again performed for the Browning Society in 1885,[2] and although Miss Alma Murray, as Colombe, was almost entirely supported by amateurs, the result fully justified Miss Mary Robinson (now Madame James Darmesteter) in writing immediately afterwards in the Boston "Literary World:"[3]—

"'Colombe's Birthday' is charming on the boards, clearer, more direct in action, more full of delicate surprises than one imagines it in print. With a very little cutting it could be made an excellent acting play."

Mr. Gosse has seen a first edition copy of it

[1] Also in 1853 or 1854 at Boston.

[2] It had been played by amateurs, members of the Browning Society, and their friends, at the house of Mr. Joseph King, in January, 1882.

[3] December 12, 1885; quoted in Mr. Arthur Symons's *Introduction to the Study of Browning.*

marked for acting, and alludes in his "Personalia" to the greatly increased knowledge of the stage which its minute directions displayed. They told also of sad experience in the sacrifice of the poet which the play-writer so often exacts: since they included the proviso that unless a very good Valence could be found, a certain speech of his should be left out. That speech is very important to the poetic, and not less to the moral, purpose of the play: the triumph of unworldly affections. It is that in which Valence defies the platitudes so often launched against rank and power, and shows that these may be very beautiful things — in which he pleads for his rival, and against his own heart. He is the better man of the two, and Colombe has fallen genuinely in love with him. But the instincts of sovereignty are not outgrown in one day, however eventful, and the young duchess has shown herself amply endowed with them. The Prince's offer promised much, and it held still more. The time may come when she will need that crowning memory of her husband's un-

selfishness and truth, not to regret what she has done.

"King Victor and King Charles" and "The Return of the Druses" are both admitted by competent judges to have good qualifications for the stage; and Mr. Browning would have preferred seeing one of these acted to witnessing the revival of "Strafford" or "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," from neither of which the best amateur performance could remove the stigma of past, real or reputed, failure; and when once a friend belonging to the Browning Society told him she had been seriously occupied with the possibility of producing the Eastern play, he assented to the idea with a simplicity that was almost touching: "It *was* written for the stage," he said, "and has only one scene." He knew, however, that the single scene was far from obviating all the difficulties of the case, and that the Society, with its limited means, did the best it could.

I seldom hear any allusion to a passage in "King Victor and King Charles" which I think more than rivals the famous utterance

of Valence, revealing as it does the same grasp of non-conventional truth, while its occasion lends itself to a far deeper recognition of the mystery, the frequent hopeless dilemma, of our moral life. It is that in which Polixena, the wife of Charles, entreats him for *duty's* sake to retain the crown, though he will earn, by so doing, neither the credit of a virtuous deed nor the sure, persistent consciousness of having performed one.

Four poems of the "Dramatic Lyrics" had appeared, as I have said, in the "Monthly Repository." Six of those included in the "Dramatic Lyrics and Romances" were first published in "Hood's Magazine" from June, 1844, to April, 1845, a month before Hood's death. These poems were, "The Laboratory," "Claret and Tokay," "Garden Fancies," "The Boy and the Angel," "The Tomb at St. Praxed's," and "The Flight of the Duchess." Mr. Hood's health had given way under stress of work, and Mr. Browning with other friends thus came forward to help him. The fact deserves remembering in connection with his

subsequent unbroken rule never to write for magazines. He might always have made exceptions for friendly or philanthropic objects; the appearance of "Hervé Riel" in the "Cornhill Magazine," 1870, indeed proves that it was so. But the offer of a blank cheque would not have tempted him, for his own sake, to this concession, as he would have deemed it, of his integrity of literary purpose.

"In a Gondola" grew out of a single verse extemporized for a picture by Maclise, in what circumstances we shall hear in the poet's own words.

The first proof of "Artemis Prologizes" had the following note: —

"I had better say perhaps that the above is nearly all retained of a tragedy I composed, much against my endeavor, while in bed with a fever two years ago — it went farther into the story of Hippolytus and Aricia; but when I got well, putting only thus much down at once, I soon forgot the remainder." [1]

[1] When Mr. Browning gave me these supplementary de-

Mr. Browning would have been very angry with himself if he had known he ever wrote "I *had* better;" and the punctuation of this note, as well as of every other unrevised specimen which we possess of his early writing, helps to show by what careful study of the literary art he must have acquired his subsequent mastery of it.

"Cristina" was addressed in fancy to the Spanish queen. It is to be regretted that the poem did not remain under its original heading of "Queen Worship:" as this gave a practical clue to the nature of the love described, and the special remoteness of its object.

"The Pied Piper of Hamelin" and another poem were written in May, 1842, for Mr. Macready's little eldest son, Willy, who was confined to the house by illness, and who was to amuse himself by illustrating the poems as

tails for the *Handbook*, he spoke as if his illness had interrupted the work, not preceded its conception. The real fact is, I think, the more striking.

well as reading them;[1] and the first of these, though not intended for publication, was added to the "Dramatic Lyrics," because some columns of that number of "Bells and Pomegranates" still required filling. It is perhaps not known that the second was "Crescentius, the Pope's Legate;" now included in "Asolando."

Mr. Browning's father had himself begun a rhymed story on the subject of "The Pied Piper;" but left it unfinished when he discovered that his son was writing one. The fragment survives as part of a letter addressed to Mr. Thomas Powell, and which I have referred to as in the possession of Mr. Dykes Campbell.

"The Lost Leader" has given rise to periodical questionings continued until the present day, as to the person indicated in its title. Mr. Browning answered or anticipated them fifteen years ago in a letter to Miss Lee, of

[1] Miss Browning has lately found some of the illustrations, and the touching childish letter together with which her brother received them.

West Peckham, Maidstone. It was his reply to an application in verse made to him in their very young days by herself and two other members of her family, the manner of which seems to have unusually pleased him.

VILLERS-SUR-MER, CALVADOS, FRANCE,
September 7, 1875.

DEAR FRIENDS, — Your letter has made a round to reach me — hence the delay in replying to it — which you will therefore pardon. I have been asked the question you put to me — though never asked so poetically and so pleasantly — I suppose a score of times: and I can only answer, with something of shame and contrition, that I undoubtedly had Wordsworth in my mind — but simply as "a model;" you know, an artist takes one or two striking traits in the features of his "model," and uses them to start his fancy on a flight which may end far enough from the good man or woman who happens to be "sitting" for nose and eye.

I thought of the great Poet's abandonment of liberalism, at an unlucky juncture, and no

repaying consequence that I could ever see. But once call my fancy-portrait *Wordsworth* — and how much more ought one to say, — how much more would not I have attempted to say!

There is my apology, dear friends, and your acceptance of it will confirm me,

Truly yours,

ROBERT BROWNING.

Some fragments of correspondence, not all very interesting, and his own allusion to an attack of illness, are our only record of the poet's general life during the interval which separated the publication of "Pippa Passes" from his second Italian journey.

An undated letter to Miss Haworth probably refers to the close of 1841.

. . . "I am getting to love painting as I did once. Do you know I was a young wonder (as are eleven out of the dozen of us) at drawing? My father had faith in me, and over yonder in a drawer of mine lies, I well know, a certain cottage and rocks in lead pen-

cil and black currant jam-juice (paint being rank poison, as they said when I sucked my brushes) with his (my father's) note in one corner, 'R. B., ætat. two years three months.' 'How fast, alas, our days we spend — How vain they be, how soon they end!' I am going to print 'Victor,' however, by February, and there is one thing not so badly painted in there, — oh, let me tell you. I chanced to call on Forster the other day, and he pressed me into committing verse on the instant, not the minute, in Maclise's behalf, who has wrought a divine Venetian work, it seems, for the British Institution. Forster described it well — but I could do nothing better than this wooden ware — (all the 'properties,' as we say, were given, and the problem was how to catalogue them in rhyme and unreason).

"I send my heart up to thee, all my heart
In this my singing!
For the stars help me, and the sea bears part;
The very night is clinging
Closer to Venice' streets to leave me space
Above me, whence thy face
May light my joyous heart to thee its dwelling-place.

"Singing and stars and night and Venice streets and joyous heart are properties, do you please to see. And now tell me, is this below the average of catalogue original poetry? Tell me, — for to that end of being told, I write. . . . I dined with dear Carlyle and his wife (catch me calling people 'dear' in a hurry, except in letter-beginnings!) yesterday. I don't know any people like them. There was a son of Burns there, Major Burns, whom Macready knows. He sung 'Of all the airts,' 'John Anderson,' and another song of his father's." . . .

In the course of 1842 he wrote the following note to Miss Flower, evidently relating to the publication of her "Hymns and Anthems:" —

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
Tuesday morning.

Dear Miss Flower, — I am sorry for what must grieve Mr. Fox; for myself, I beg him earnestly not to see me till his entire convenience, however pleased I shall be to receive the letter you promise on his part.

And how can I thank you enough for this good news — all this music I shall be so thoroughly gratified to hear?

Ever yours faithfully,

ROBERT BROWNING.

His last letter to her was written in 1845; the subject being a concert of her own sacred music, which she was about to give; and again, although more slightly, I anticipate the course of events in order to give it in its natural connection with the present one. Mr. Browning was now engaged to be married, and the last ring of youthful levity had disappeared from his tone; but neither the new happiness nor the new responsibility had weakened his interest in his boyhood's friend. Miss Flower must then have been slowly dying, and the closing words of the letter have the solemnity of a last farewell.

Sunday.

DEAR MISS FLOWER, — I was very foolishly surprised at the sorrowful finical notice you mention: foolishly; for, God help us, how

else is it with all critics of everything — don't I hear them talk and see them write? I dare say he admires you as he said.

For me, I never had another feeling than entire admiration for your music — entire admiration — I put it apart from all other English music I know, and fully believe in it as *the* music we all waited for.

Of your health I shall not trust myself to speak: you must know what is unspoken. I should have been most happy to see you if but for a minute — and if next Wednesday I might take your hand for a moment —

But you would concede that, if it were right, remembering what is now very old friendship.

May God bless you forever,

(The signature has been cut off.)

In the autumn of 1844 Mr. Browning set forth for Italy, taking ship, it is believed, direct to Naples. Here he made the acquaintance of a young Neapolitan gentleman who had spent most of his life in Paris; and they

became such good friends that they proceeded to Rome together. Mr. Scotti was an invaluable traveling companion, for he engaged their conveyance, and did all such bargaining in their joint interest as the habits of his country required. "As I write," Mr. Browning said in a letter to his sister, "I hear him disputing our bill in the next room. He does not see why we should pay for six wax candles when we have used only two." At Rome they spent most of their evenings with an old acquaintance of Mr. Browning's, then Countess Carducci, and she pronounced Mr. Scotti the handsomest man she had ever seen. He certainly bore no appearance of being the least prosperous. But he blew out his brains soon after he and his new friend had parted; and I do not think the act was ever fully accounted for.

It must have been on his return journey that Mr. Browning went to Leghorn to see Edward John Trelawney, to whom he carried a letter of introduction. He described the interview long afterwards to Mr. Val Prinsep,

but chiefly in his impressions of the cool courage which Mr. Trelawney had displayed during its course. A surgeon was occupied all the time in probing his leg for a bullet which had been lodged there some years before, and had lately made itself felt; and he showed himself absolutely indifferent to the pain of the operation. Mr. Browning's main object in paying the visit had been, naturally, to speak with one who had known Byron and been the last to see Shelley alive; but we only hear of the two poets that they formed in part the subject of their conversation. He reached England, again, we suppose, through Germany — since he avoided Paris as before.

It has been asserted by persons otherwise well informed, that on this, if not on his previous Italian journey, Mr. Browning became acquainted with Stendhal, then French Consul at Civita Vecchia, and that he imbibed from the great novelist a taste for curiosities of Italian family history, which ultimately led him in the direction of the Franceschini case. It is certain that he profoundly admired this

writer, and if he was not, at some time or other, introduced to him, it was because the opportunity did not occur. But there is abundant evidence that no introduction took place, and quite sufficient proof that none was possible. Stendhal died in Paris in March, 1842; and granting that he was at Civita Vecchia when the poet made his earlier voyage — no certainty even while he held the appointment — the ship cannot have touched there on its way to Trieste. It is also a mistake to suppose that Mr. Browning was specially interested in ancient chronicles, as such. This was one of the points on which he distinctly differed from his father. He took his dramatic subjects wherever he found them, and any historical research which they ultimately involved was undertaken for purposes of verification. "Sordello" alone may have been conceived on a rather different plan, and I have no authority whatever for admitting that it was so. The discovery of the record of the Franceschini case was, as its author has everywhere declared, an accident.

A single relic exists for us of this visit to the South — a shell picked up, according to its inscription, on one of the Siren Isles, October 4, 1844; but many of its reminiscences are embodied in that vivid and charming picture "The Englishman in Italy," which appeared in the "Bells and Pomegranates" number for the following year. Naples always remained a bright spot in the poet's memory; and if it had been, like Asolo, his first experience of Italy, it must have drawn him in later years the more powerfully of the two. At one period, indeed, he dreamed of it as a home for his declining days.

CHAPTER IX.

1844–1849.

Introduction to Miss Barrett. — Engagement. — Motives for Secrecy. — Marriage. — Journey to Italy. — Extract of Letter from Mr. Fox. — Mrs. Browning's Letters to Miss Mitford. — Life at Pisa. — Vallombrosa. — Florence ; Mr. Powers ; Miss Boyle. — Proposed British Mission to the Vatican. — Father Prout. — Palazzo Guidi. — Fano ; Ancona. — "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" at Sadler's Wells.

During his recent intercourse with the Browning family Mr. Kenyon had often spoken of his invalid cousin, Elizabeth Barrett,[1] and had given them copies of her works ; and when the poet returned to England, late in 1844, he saw the volume containing "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," which had appeared during his absence. On hearing him express

[1] Properly E. Barrett Moulton-Barrett. The first of these surnames was that originally borne by the family, but dropped on the annexation of the second. It has now for some years been resumed.

his admiration of it, Mr. Kenyon begged him to write to Miss Barrett, and himself tell her how the poems had impressed him; "for," he added, "my cousin is a great invalid, and sees no one, but great souls jump at sympathy." Mr. Browning did write, and, a few months, probably, after the correspondence had been established, begged to be allowed to visit her. She at first refused this, on the score of her delicate health and habitual seclusion, emphasizing the refusal by words of such touching humility and resignation that I cannot refrain from quoting them. "There is nothing to see in me, nothing to hear in me. I am a weed fit for the ground and darkness." But her objections were overcome, and their first interview sealed Mr. Browning's fate.

There is no cause for surprise in the passionate admiration with which Miss Barrett so instantly inspired him. To begin with, he was heart-whole. It would be too much to affirm that, in the course of his thirty-two years, he had never met with a woman whom he could entirely love; but if he had, it was

not under circumstances which favored the growth of such a feeling. She whom he now saw for the first time had long been to him one of the greatest of living poets; she was learned as women seldom were in those days. It must have been apparent, in the most fugitive contact, that her moral nature was as exquisite as her mind was exceptional. She looked much younger than her age, which he only recently knew to have been six years beyond his own; and her face was filled with beauty by the large, expressive eyes. The imprisoned love within her must unconsciously have leapt to meet his own. It would have been only natural that he should grow into the determination to devote his life to hers, or be swept into an offer of marriage by a sudden impulse which his after-judgment would condemn. Neither of these things occurred. The offer was indeed made under a sudden and overmastering impulse. But it was persistently repeated, till it had obtained a conditional assent. No sane man in Mr. Browning's position could have been ignorant

of the responsibilities he was incurring. He had, it is true, no experience of illness. Of its nature, its treatment, its symptoms direct and indirect, he remained pathetically ignorant to his dying day. He did not know what disqualifications for active existence might reside in the fragile, recumbent form, nor in the long years lived without change of air or scene beyond the passage, not always even allowed, from bedroom to sitting-room, from sofa to bed again. But he did know that Miss Barrett received him lying down, and that his very ignorance of her condition left him without security for her ever being able to stand. A strong sense of sympathy and pity could alone entirely justify or explain his act, — a strong desire to bring sunshine into that darkened life. We might be sure that these motives had been present with him if we had no direct authority for believing it; and we have this authority in his own comparatively recent words: "She had so much need of care and protection. There was so much pity in what I felt

for her!" The pity was, it need hardly be said, at no time a substitute for love, though the love in its full force only developed itself later; but it supplied an additional incentive.

Miss Barrett had made her acceptance of Mr. Browning's proposal contingent on her improving in health. The outlook was therefore vague. But under the influence of this great new happiness she did gain some degree of strength. They saw each other three times a week; they exchanged letters constantly, and a very deep and perfect understanding established itself between them. Mr. Browning never mentioned his visits except to his own family, because it was naturally feared that if Miss Barrett were known to receive one person, other friends, or even acquaintances, would claim admittance to her; and Mr. Kenyon, who was greatly pleased by the result of his introduction, kept silence for the same reason.

In this way the months slipped by till the summer of 1846 was drawing to its close, and

Miss Barrett's doctor then announced that her only chance of even comparative recovery lay in spending the coming winter in the South. There was no rational obstacle to her acting on this advice, since more than one of her brothers was willing to escort her; but Mr. Barrett, while surrounding his daughter with every possible comfort, had resigned himself to her invalid condition and expected her also to acquiesce in it. He probably did not believe that she would benefit by the proposed change. At any rate he refused his consent to it. There remained to her only one alternative, — to break with the old home, and travel southwards as Mr. Browning's wife.

When she had finally assented to this course, she took a preparatory step which, in so far as it was known, must itself have been sufficiently startling to those about her: she drove to Regent's Park, and when there, stepped out of the carriage and on to the grass. I do not know how long she stood — probably only for a moment; but I well remember hearing that when, after so long an

interval, she felt earth under her feet and air about her, the sensation was almost bewilderingly strange.

They were married, with strict privacy, on September 12, 1846, at St. Pancras Church.

The engaged pair had not only not obtained Mr. Barrett's sanction to their marriage; they had not even invoked it; and the doubly clandestine character thus forced upon the union could not be otherwise than repugnant to Mr. Browning's pride; but it was dictated by the deepest filial affection on the part of his intended wife. There could be no question in so enlightened a mind of sacrificing her own happiness with that of the man she loved; she was determined to give herself to him. But she knew that her father would never consent to her doing so; and she preferred marrying without his knowledge to acting in defiance of a prohibition which, once issued, he would never have revoked, and which would have weighed like a portent of evil upon her. She even kept the secret of her engagement from her intimate

friend Miss Mitford, and her second father, Mr. Kenyon, that they might not be involved in its responsibility. And Mr. Kenyon, who, probably of all her circle, best understood the case, was grateful to her for this consideration.

Mr. Barrett was one of those men who will not part with their children ; who will do anything for them except to allow them to leave the parental home. We have all known fathers of this type. He had nothing to urge against Robert Browning. When Mr. Kenyon, later, said to him that he could not understand his hostility to the marriage, since there was no man in the world to whom he would more gladly have given his daughter if he had been so fortunate as to possess one,[1] he replied : "I have no objection to the young man, but my daughter should have been thinking of another world ; " and, given his conviction that Miss Barrett's state was hopeless, some allowance must be made for the angered

[1] Mr. Kenyon had been twice married, but he had no children.

sense of fitness which her elopement was calculated to arouse in him. But his attitude was the same, under the varying circumstances, with all his daughters and sons alike. There was no possible husband or wife whom he would cordially have accepted for one of them.

Mr. Browning had been willing, even at that somewhat late age, to study for the Bar, or accept, if he could obtain it, any other employment which might render him less ineligible from a pecuniary point of view. But Miss Barrett refused to hear of such a course; and the subsequent necessity for her leaving England would have rendered it useless.

For some days after their marriage Mr. and Mrs. Browning returned to their old life. He justly thought that the agitation of the ceremony had been, for the moment, as much as she could endure, and had therefore fixed for it a day prior by one week to that of their intended departure from England. The only difference in their habits was that he did not see her; he recoiled from the hypocrisy of asking for her under her maiden name; and dur-

ing this passive interval, fortunately short, he carried a weight of anxiety and of depression which placed it among the most painful periods of his existence.

In the late afternoon or evening of September 19, Mrs. Browning, attended by her maid and her dog, stole away from her father's house. The family were at dinner, at which meal she was not in the habit of joining them; her sisters Henrietta and Arabel had been throughout in the secret of her attachment and in full sympathy with it; in the case of the servants, she was also sure of friendly connivance. There was no difficulty in her escape, but that created by the dog, which might be expected to bark its consciousness of the unusual situation. She took him into her confidence. She said: "O Flush, if you make a sound, I am lost." And Flush understood, — as what good dog would not? — and crept after his mistress in silence. I do not remember where her husband joined her; we may be sure it was as near her home as possible. That night they took the boat to Havre, on their way to Paris.

Only a short time elapsed before Mr. Barrett became aware of what had happened. It is not necessary to dwell on his indignation, which at that moment, I believe, was shared by all his sons. Nor were they the only persons to be agitated by the occurrence. If there was wrath in the Barrett family, there was consternation in that of Mr. Browning. He had committed a crime in the eyes of his wife's father; but he had been guilty, in the judgment of his own parents, of one of those errors which are worse. A hundred times the possible advantages of marrying a Miss Barrett could never have balanced for them the risks and dangers he had incurred in wresting to himself the guardianship of that frail life which might perish in his hands, leaving him to be accused of having destroyed it; and they must have awaited the event with feelings never to be forgotten.

It was soon to be apparent that in breaking the chains which bound her to a sick-room, Mr. Browning had not killed his wife, but was giving her a new lease of existence. His par-

ents and sister soon loved her dearly, for her own sake as well as her husband's; and those who, if in a mistaken manner, had hitherto cherished her, gradually learned, with one exception, to value him for hers. It would, however, be useless to deny that the marriage was a hazardous experiment, involving risks of suffering quite other than those connected with Mrs. Browning's safety: the latent practical disparities of an essentially vigorous and an essentially fragile existence; and the time came when these were to make themselves felt. Mrs. Browning had been a delicate infant. She had also outgrown this delicacy and developed into a merry, and, in the harmless sense, mischief-loving child. The accident which subsequently undermined her life could only have befallen a very active and healthy girl.[1]

[1] Her family at that time lived in the country. She was a constant rider, and fond of saddling her pony; and one day, when she was about fourteen, she overbalanced herself in lifting the saddle, and fell backward, inflicting injuries on her head, or rather spine, which caused her great suffering, but of which the nature remained for some time undiscovered.

Her condition justified hope and, to a great extent, fulfilled it. She rallied surprisingly and almost suddenly in the sunshine of her new life, and remained for several years at the higher physical level: her natural and now revived spirits sometimes, I imagine, lifting her beyond it. But her ailments were too radical for permanent cure, as the weak voice and shrunken form never ceased to attest. They renewed themselves, though in slightly different conditions; and she gradually relapsed, during the winters at least, into something like the home-bound condition of her earlier days. It became impossible that she should share the more active side of her husband's existence. It had to be alternately suppressed and carried on without her. The deep heart-love, the many-sided intellectual sympathy, preserved their union in rare beauty to the end. But to say that it thus maintained itself as if by magic, without effort of self-sacrifice on his part or of resignation on hers, would be as unjust to the noble qualities of both, as it would be false to assert that its compensating happiness had ever failed them.

Mr. Browning's troubles did not, even for the present, exhaust themselves in that week of apprehension. They assumed a deeper reality when his delicate wife first gave herself into his keeping, and the long hours on steamboat and in diligence were before them. What she suffered in body, and he in mind, during the first days of that wedding-journey is better imagined than told. In Paris they either met, or were joined by, a friend, Mrs. Anna Jameson (then also *en route* for Italy), and Mrs. Browning was doubly cared for till she and her husband could once more put themselves on their way. At Genoa came the long-needed rest in southern land. From thence, in a few days, they went on to Pisa, and settled there for the winter.

Even so great a friend as John Forster was not in the secret of Mr. Browning's marriage; we learn this through an amusing paragraph in a letter from Mr. Fox, written soon after it had taken place: —

"Forster never heard of the Browning marriage till the proof of the newspaper ('Exam-

iner') notice was sent; when he went into one of his great passions at the supposed hoax, ordered up the compositor to have a swear at him, and demanded to see the MS. from which it was taken: so it was brought, and he instantly recognized the hand of Browning's sister. Next day came a letter from R. B., saying he had often meant to tell him or write of it, but hesitated between the two, and neglected both.

"She was better, and a winter in Italy had been recommended some months ago.

"It seems as if made up by their poetry rather than themselves."

Many interesting external details of Mr. Browning's married life must have been lost to us through the wholesale destruction of his letters to his family, of which mention has been already made, and which he carried out before leaving Warwick Crescent about four years ago; and Mrs. Browning's part in the correspondence, though still preserved, cannot fill the gap, since for a long time it chiefly consisted of little personal outpourings, in-

closed in her husband's letters and supplementary to them. But she also wrote constantly to Miss Mitford; and, from the letters addressed to her, now fortunately in Mr. Barrett Browning's hands, it has been possible to extract many passages of a sufficiently great, and not too private, interest, for our purpose. These extracts — in some cases almost entire letters — indeed constitute a fairly complete record of Mr. and Mrs. Browning's joint life till the summer of 1854, when Miss Mitford's death was drawing near, and the correspondence ceased. Their chronological order is not always certain, because Mrs. Browning never gave the year in which her letters were written, and in some cases the postmark is obliterated; but the missing date can almost always be gathered from their contents. The first letter is probably written from Paris.

October 2 [1846].

. . . and he, as you say, had done everything for me — he loved me for reasons which had helped to weary me of myself — loved me

heart to heart persistently — in spite of my own will . . . drawn me back to life and hope again when I had done with both. My life seemed to belong to him and to none other, at last, and I had no power to speak a word. Have faith in me, my dearest friend, till you know him. The intellect is so little in comparison to all the rest — to the womanly tenderness, the inexhaustible goodness, the high and noble aspiration of every hour. Temper, spirits, manners — there is not a flaw anywhere. I shut my eyes sometimes and fancy it all a dream of my guardian angel. Only, if it had been a dream, the pain of some parts of it would have wakened me before now — it is not a dream. . . .

The three next speak for themselves.

PISA [1846].

. . . For Pisa, we both like it extremely. The city is full of beauty and repose — and the purple mountains gloriously seem to beckon us on deeper into the vine land. We

have rooms close to the Duomo, and leaning down on the great Collegio built by Facini. Three excellent bedrooms and a sitting-room matted and carpeted, looking comfortable even for England. For the last fortnight, except the last few sunny days, we have had rain; but the climate is as mild as possible, no cold with all the damp. Delightful weather we had for the traveling. Mrs. Jameson says she won't call me improved but transformed rather. . . . I mean to know something about pictures some day. Robert does, and I shall get him to open my eyes for me with a little instruction — in this place are to be seen the first steps of Art. . . .

PISA, *December* 19 [1846].

. . . Within these three or four days we have had frost — yes, and a little snow — for the first time, say the Pisans, within five years. Robert says the mountains are powdered towards Lucca. . . .

February 3 [1847].

. . . Robert is a warm admirer of Balzac and has read most of his books, but certainly he does not in a general way appreciate our French people quite with my warmth. He takes too high a standard, I tell him, and won't listen to a story for a story's sake — I can bear, you know, to be amused without a strong pull on my admiration. So we have great wars sometimes — I pull up Dumas's flag or Soulié's or Eugène Sue's (yet he was properly impressed by the "Mystères de Paris"), and carry it till my arms ache. The plays and vaudevilles he knows far more of than I do, and always maintains they are the happiest growth of the French school. Setting aside the *masters*, observe; for Balzac and George Sand hold all their honors. Then we read together the other day "Rouge et Noir," that powerful work of Stendhal's, and he observed that it was exactly like Balzac *in the raw* — in the material and undeveloped conception. . . . We leave Pisa in April, and pass through Florence towards the north of Italy. . . .

(She writes out a long list of the "Comédie Humaine" for Miss Mitford.)

Mr. and Mrs. Browning must have remained in Florence, instead of merely passing through it; this is proved by the contents of the two following letters: —

August 20 [1847].

. . . We have spent one of the most delightful of summers notwithstanding the heat, and I begin to comprehend the possibility of St. Lawrence's ecstasies on the gridiron. Very hot certainly it has been and is, yet there have been cool intermissions, and as we have spacious and airy rooms, as Robert lets me sit all day in my white dressing-gown without a single masculine criticism, and as we can step out of the window on a sort of balcony terrace which is quite private, and swims over with moonlight in the evenings, and as we live upon watermelons and iced water and figs and all manner of fruit, we bear the heat with an angelic patience.

We tried to make the monks of Vallombrosa

let us stay with them for two months, but the new abbot said or implied that Wilson and I stank in his nostrils, being women. So we were sent away at the end of five days. So provoking! Such scenery, such hills, such a sea of hills looking alive among the clouds — which rolled, it was difficult to discern. Such fine woods, supernaturally silent, with the ground black as ink. There were eagles there too, and there was no road. Robert went on horseback, and Wilson and I were drawn on a sledge (*i. e.* an old hamper, a basket wine-hamper — without a wheel) by two white bullocks, up the precipitous mountains. Think of my traveling in those wild places at four o'clock in the morning! a little frightened, dreadfully tired, but in an ecstasy of admiration. It was a sight to see before one died and went away into another world. But being expelled ignominiously at the end of five days, we had to come back to Florence to find a new apartment cooler than the old, and wait for dear Mr. Kenyon, and dear Mr. Kenyon does not come after all. And on the 20th of

September we take up our knapsacks and turn our faces towards Rome, creeping slowly along, with a pause at Arezzo, and a longer pause at Perugia, and another perhaps at Terni. Then we plan to take an apartment we have heard of, over the Tarpeian rock, and enjoy Rome as we have enjoyed Florence. More can scarcely be. This Florence is unspeakably beautiful . . .

October [1847].

. . . Very few acquaintances have we made in Florence, and very quietly lived out our days. Mr. Powers, the sculptor, is our chief friend and favorite. A most charming, simple, straightforward, genial American — as simple as the man of genius he has proved himself to be. He sometimes comes to talk and take coffee with us, and we like him much. The sculptor has eyes like a wild Indian's, so black and full of light — you would scarcely marvel if they clove the marble without the help of his hands. We have seen, besides, the Hoppners, Lord Byron's friends at Venice; and Miss Boyle, a niece of the

Earl of Cork, an authoress and poetess on her own account, having been introduced to Robert in London at Lady Morgan's, has hunted us out, and paid us a visit. A very vivacious little person, with sparkling talk enough . . .

In this year, 1847, the question arose of a British mission to the Vatican; and Mr. Browning wrote to Mr. Monckton Milnes begging him to signify to the Foreign Office his more than willingness to take part in it. He would be glad and proud, he said, to be secretary to such an embassy, and to work like a horse in his vocation. The letter is given in the lately published biography of Lord Houghton, and I am obliged to confess that it has been my first intimation of the fact recorded there. When once his "Paracelsus" had appeared, and Mr. Browning had taken rank as poet, he renounced all idea of more active work; and the tone and habits of his early married life would have seemed scarcely consistent with a renewed impulse towards it. But the fact was in some sense due to the

very circumstances of that life: among them, his wife's probable incitement to, and certain sympathy with, the proceeding.

The projected winter in Rome had been given up, I believe against the doctor's advice, on the strength of the greater attractions of Florence. Our next extract is dated from thence, December 8, 1847.

. . . "Think what we have done since I last wrote to you. Taken two houses, that is, two apartments, each for six months, presigning the contract. You will set it down to excellent poet's work in the way of domestic economy, but the fault was altogether mine, as usual. My husband, to please me, took rooms which I could not be pleased with three days through the absence of sunshine and warmth. The consequence was that we had to pay heaps of guineas away, for leave to go away ourselves — any alternative being preferable to a return of illness — and I am sure I should have been ill if we had persisted in staying there. You can scarcely fancy the wonderful difference which the sun makes in

Italy. So away we came into the blaze of him in the Piazza Pitti; precisely opposite the Grand Duke's palace; I with my remorse, and poor Robert without a single reproach. Any other man, a little lower than the angels, would have stamped and sworn a little for the mere relief of the thing — but as to *his* being angry with *me* for any cause except not eating enough dinner, the said sun would turn the wrong way first. So here we are in the Pitti till April, in small rooms yellow with sunshine from morning till evening, and most days I am able to get out into the piazza and walk up and down for twenty minutes without feeling a breath of the actual winter . . . and Miss Boyle, ever and anon, comes at night, at nine o'clock, to catch us at hot chestnuts and mulled wine, and warm her feet at our fire — and a kinder, more cordial little creature, full of talent and accomplishment, never had the world's polish on it. Very amusing she is too, and original; and a good deal of laughing she and Robert make between them. And this is nearly all we see of

the Face Divine — I can't make Robert go out a single evening." . . .

We have five extracts for 1848. One of these, not otherwise dated, describes an attack of sore-throat which was fortunately Mr. Browning's last; and the letter containing it must have been written in the course of the summer.

. . . "My husband was laid up for nearly a month with fever and relaxed sore-throat. Quite unhappy I have been over those burning hands and languid eyes — the only unhappiness I ever had by him. And then he would n't see a physician, and if it had not been that just at the right moment Mr. Mahoney, the celebrated Jesuit, and 'Father Prout' of Fraser, knowing everything as those Jesuits are apt to do, came in to us on his way to Rome, pointed out to us that the fever got ahead through weakness, and mixed up with his own kind hand a potion of eggs and port wine, — to the horror of our Italian servant, who lifted up his eyes at such a prescription for fever, crying, 'O Inglesi! Inglesi!' — the

case would have been far worse, I have no kind of doubt, for the eccentric prescription gave the power of sleeping, and the pulse grew quieter directly. I shall always be grateful to Father Prout — always." [1]

May 28.

. . . And now I must tell you what we have done since I wrote last, little thinking of doing so. You see our problem was, to get to England as much in summer as possible, the expense of the intermediate journeys making it difficult of solution. On examination of the whole case, it appeared manifest that we were throwing money into the Arno, by our way of taking furnished rooms, while to take an apartment and furnish it would leave us a clear return of the furniture at the end of the first year in exchange for our outlay, and all but a free residence afterwards, the cheapness of furniture being quite fabulous at the present crisis. . . . In fact, we have really done

[1] It had not been merely a case of relaxed sore-throat. There was an abscess, which burst during this first night of sleep.

it magnificently, and planted ourselves in the Guidi Palace in the favorite suite of the last Count (his arms are in scagliola on the floor of my bedroom). Though we have six beautiful rooms and a kitchen, three of them quite palace rooms and opening on a terrace, and though such furniture as comes by slow degrees into them is antique and worthy of the place, we yet shall have saved money by the end of this year. . . . Now I tell you all this lest you should hear dreadful rumors of our having forsaken our native land, venerable institutions and all, whereas we remember it so well (it 's a dear land in many senses), that we have done this thing chiefly in order to make sure of getting back comfortably, . . . a stone's throw, too, it is from the Pitti, and really in my present mind I would hardly exchange with the Grand Duke himself. By the bye, as to street, we have no spectators in windows in just the gray wall of a church called San Felice for good omen.

Now, have you heard enough of us? What I claimed first, in way of privilege, was

a spring-sofa to loll upon, and a supply of rain water to wash in, and you shall see what a picturesque oil-jar they have given us for the latter purpose; it would just hold the Captain of the Forty Thieves. As for the chairs and tables, I yield the more especial interest in them to Robert; only you would laugh to hear us correct one another sometimes. "Dear, you get too many drawers, and not enough washing-stands. Pray don't let us have any more drawers when we 've nothing more to put in them." There was no division on the necessity of having six spoons — some questions passed themselves. . . .

July.

. . . I am quite well again and strong. Robert and I go out often after tea in a wandering walk to sit in the Loggia and look at the Perseus, or, better still, at the divine sunsets on the Arno, turning it to pure gold under the bridges. After more than twenty months of marriage, we are happier than ever. . . .

August.

. . . As for ourselves we have hardly done so well — yet well — having enjoyed a great deal in spite of drawbacks. Murray, the traitor, sent us to Fano as "a delightful summer residence for an English family," and we found it uninhabitable from the heat, vegetation scorched into paleness, the very air swooning in the sun, and the gloomy looks of the inhabitants sufficiently corroborative of their words that no drop of rain or dew ever falls there during the summer. A "circulating library" which "does not give out books," and "a refined and intellectual Italian society" (I quote Murray for that phrase) which "never reads a book through" (I quote Mrs. Wiseman, Dr. Wiseman's mother, who has lived in Fano seven years) complete the advantages of the place. Yet the churches are very beautiful, and a divine picture of Guercino's is worth going all that way to see. . . . We fled from Fano after three days, and finding ourselves cheated out of our dream of summer coolness, resolved on substituting for it what the Italians

call "*un bel giro.*" So we went to Ancona — a striking sea city, holding up against the brown rocks, and elbowing out the purple tides — beautiful to look upon. An exfoliation of the rock itself you would call the houses that seem to grow there — so identical is the color and character. I should like to visit Ancona again when there is a little air and shadow. We stayed a week, as it was, living upon fish and cold water. . . .

The one dated Florence, December 16, is interesting with reference to Mr. Browning's attitude when he wrote the letters to Mr. Frank Hill which I have recently quoted.

"We have been, at least I have been, a little anxious lately about the fate of the 'Blot in the 'Scutcheon' which Mr. Phelps applied for my husband's permission to revive at Sadler's. Of course putting the request was mere form, as he had every right to act the play — only it made *me* anxious till we heard the result — and we both of us are very grateful to dear Mr. Chorley, who not only made it his

business to be at the theatre the first night, but, before he slept, sat down like a true friend to give us the story of the result, and never, he says, was a more legitimate success. The play went straight to the hearts of the audience, it seems, and we hear of its continuance on the stage, from the papers. You may remember, or may not have heard, how Macready brought it out and put his foot on it, in the flush of a quarrel between manager and author; and Phelps, knowing the whole secret and feeling the power of the play, determined on making a revival of it in his own theatre. Mr. Chorley called his acting 'fine.'" . . .

CHAPTER X.

1849–1852.

Death of Mr. Browning's Mother. — Birth of his Son. — Mrs. Browning's Letters continued. — Baths of Lucca. — Florence again. — Venice. — Margaret Fuller Ossoli. — Visit to England. — Winter in Paris. — Carlyle. — George Sand. — Alfred de Musset.

On March 9, 1849, Mr. Browning's son was born. With the joy of his wife's deliverance from the dangers of such an event came also his first great sorrow. His mother did not live to receive the news of her grandchild's birth. The letter which conveyed it found her still breathing, but in the unconsciousness of approaching death. There had been no time for warning. The sister could only break the suddenness of the shock. A letter of Mrs. Browning's tells what was to be told.

FLORENCE, *April* 30 [1849].

. . . This is the first packet of letters, except one to Wimpole Street, which I have written since my confinement. You will have heard how our joy turned suddenly into deep sorrow by the death of my husband's mother. An unsuspected disease (ossification of the heart) terminated in a fatal way — and she lay in the insensibility precursive of the grave's when the letter written with such gladness by my poor husband, and announcing the birth of his child, reached her address. "It would have made her heart bound," said her daughter to us. Poor tender heart — the last throb was too near. The medical men would not allow the news to be communicated. The next joy she felt was to be in heaven itself. My husband has been in the deepest anguish, and indeed, except for the courageous consideration of his sister, who wrote two letters of preparation, saying "She was not well" and she "was very ill" when in fact all was over, I am frightened to think what the result would have been to him. He has loved his mother

as such passionate natures only can love, and I never saw a man so bowed down in an extremity of sorrow — never. Even now, the depression is great — and sometimes when I leave him alone a little and return to the room, I find him in tears. I do earnestly wish to change the scene and air — but where to go? England looks terrible now. He says it would break his heart to see his mother's roses over the wall and the place where she used to lay her scissors and gloves — which I understand so thoroughly that I can't say "Let us go to England." We must wait and see what his father and sister will choose to do, or choose us to do — for of course a duty plainly seen would draw us anywhere. My own dearest sisters will be painfully disappointed by any change of plan — only they are too good and kind not to understand the difficulty — not to see the motive. So do you, I am certain. It has been very, very painful altogether, this drawing together of life and death. Robert was too enraptured at my safety and with his little son, and the sudden reaction was terrible. . . .

BAGNI DI LUCCA.

. . . We have been wandering in search of cool air and a cool bough among all the olive-trees to build our summer nest on. My husband has been suffering beyond what one could shut one's eyes to, in consequence of the great mental shock of last March — loss of appetite, loss of sleep — looks quite worn and altered. His spirits never rallied except with an effort, and every letter from New Cross threw him back into deep depression. I was very anxious, and feared much that the end of it all would be (the intense heat of Florence assisting) nervous fever or something similar; and I had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to leave Florence for a month or two. He who generally delights in traveling had no mind for change or movement. I had to say and swear that Baby and I could n't bear the heat, and that we must and would go away. "Ce que femme veut, *homme* veut," if the latter is at all amiable, or the former persevering. At last I gained the victory. It was agreed that we two should go on an ex-

ploring journey, to find out where we could have most shadow at least expense; and we left our child with his nurse and Wilson, while we were absent. We went along the coast to Spezzia, saw Carrara with the white marble mountains, passed through the olive-forests and the vineyards, avenues of acacia-trees, chestnut woods, glorious surprises of the most exquisite scenery. I say olive-forests advisedly — the olive grows like a forest tree in those regions, shading the ground with tints of silvery network. The olive near Florence is but a shrub in comparison, and I have learnt to despise a little too the Florentine vine, which does not swing such portcullises of massive dewy green from one tree to another as along the whole road where we traveled. Beautiful indeed it was. Spezzia wheels the blue sea into the arms of the wooded mountains; and we had a glance at Shelley's house at Lerici. It was melancholy to me, of course. I was not sorry that the lodgings we inquired about were far above our means. We returned on our steps (after two

days in the dirtiest of possible inns), saw Seraverra, a village in the mountains, where rock, river, and wood enticed us to stay, and the inhabitants drove us off by their unreasonable prices. It is curious — but just in proportion to the want of civilization the prices rise in Italy. If you have n't cups and saucers, you are made to pay for plate. Well — so finding no rest for the soles of our feet, I persuaded Robert to go to the Baths of Lucca, only to see them. We were to proceed afterwards to San Marcello, or some safer wilderness. We had both of us, but he chiefly, the strongest prejudice against the Baths of Lucca; taking them for a sort of wasp's nest of scandal and gaming, and expecting to find everything trodden flat by the continental English — yet, I wanted to see the place, because it is a place to see, after all. So we came, and were so charmed by the exquisite beauty of the scenery, by the coolness of the climate, and the absence of our countrymen — political troubles serving admirably our private requirements, that we made an offer for rooms on

the spot, and returned to Florence for Baby and the rest of our establishment without further delay. Here we are then. We have been here more than a fortnight. We have taken an apartment for the season — four months, paying twelve pounds for the whole term, and hoping to be able to stay till the end of October. The living is cheaper than even in Florence, so that there has been no extravagance in coming here. In fact Florence is scarcely tenable during the summer from the excessive heat by day and night, even if there were no particular motive for leaving it. We have taken a sort of eagle's nest in this place — the highest house of the highest of the three villages which are called the Bagni di Lucca, and which lie at the heart of a hundred mountains sung to continually by a rushing mountain stream. The sound of the river and of the cicale is all the noise we hear. Austrian drums and carriage-wheels cannot vex us, God be thanked for it! The silence is full of joy and consolation. I think my husband's spirits are better already, and his appetite improved.

Certainly little Babe's great cheeks are growing rosier and rosier. He is out all day when the sun is not too strong, and Wilson will have it that he is prettier than the whole population of babies here. . . . Then my whole strength has wonderfully improved, — just as my medical friends prophesied, — and it seems like a dream when I find myself able to climb the hills with Robert, and help him to lose himself in the forests. Ever since my confinement I have been growing stronger and stronger, and where it is to stop I can't tell really. I can do as much or more than at any point of my life since I arrived at woman's estate. The air of the place seems to penetrate the heart, and not the lungs only: it draws you, raises you, excites you. Mountain air without its keenness — sheathed in Italian sunshine — think what that must be! And the beauty and the solitude — for with a few paces we get free of the habitations of men — all is delightful to me. What is peculiarly beautiful and wonderful is the variety of the shapes of the mountains. They are a multi-

tude — and yet there is no likeness. None, except where the golden mist comes and transfigures them into one glory. For the rest, the mountain there wrapt in the chestnut forest is not like that bare peak which tilts against the sky — nor like the serpent twine of another which seems to move and coil in the moving coiling shadow. . . .

She writes again: —

BAGNI DI LUCCA, *October* 2 [1849].

. . . I have performed a great exploit — ridden on a donkey five miles deep into the mountain, to an almost inaccessible volcanic ground not far from the stars. Robert on horseback, and Wilson and the nurse (with Baby) on other donkeys, — guides of course. We set off at eight in the morning, and returned at six P. M. after dining on the mountain pinnacle, I dreadfully tired, but the child laughing as usual, burnt brick color for all bad effect. No horse or ass untrained for the mountains could have kept foot a moment where we penetrated, and even as it was, one

could not help the natural thrill. No road except the bed of exhausted torrents — above and through the chestnut forests precipitous beyond what you would think possible for ascent or descent. Ravines tearing the ground to pieces under your feet. The scenery, sublime and wonderful, satisfied us wholly, as we looked round on the world of innumerable mountains, bound faintly with the gray sea — and not a human habitation. . . .

The following fragment, which I have received quite without date, might refer to this or to a somewhat later period.

"If he is vain about anything in the world it is about my improved health, and I say to him, 'But you need n't talk so much to people of how your wife walked here with you, and there with you, as if a wife with a pair of feet was a miracle of nature.'"

FLORENCE, *February* 18 [1850].

. . . You can scarcely imagine to yourself the retired life we live, and how we have

retreated from the kind advances of the English society here. Now people seem to understand that we are to be left alone. . . .

FLORENCE, *April* 1 [1850].

. . . We drive day by day through the lovely Cascine, just sweeping through the city. Just such a window where Bianca Capello looked out to see the Duke go by — and just such a door where Tasso stood and where Dante drew his chair out to sit. Strange to have all that old world life about us, and the blue sky so bright. . . .

VENICE, *June* 4 [probably 1850].

. . . I have been between Heaven and Earth since our arrival at Venice. The Heaven of it is ineffable — never had I touched the skirts of so celestial a place. The beauty of the architecture, the silver trails of water up between all that gorgeous color and carving, the enchanting silence, the music, the gondolas — I mix it all up together and maintain that nothing is like it, nothing equal to it, not a second Venice in the world.

Do you know when I came first I felt as if I never could go away. But now comes the earth-side.

Robert, after sharing the ecstasy, grows uncomfortable and nervous, unable to eat or sleep, and poor Wilson still worse, in a miserable condition of sickness and headache. Alas for these mortal Venices, so exquisite and so bilious! Therefore I am constrained away from my joys by sympathy, and am forced to be glad that we are going away on Friday. For myself, it did not affect me at all. Take the mild, soft, relaxing climate — even the sirocco does not touch me. And the baby grows gloriously fatter in spite of everything. . . . As for Venice, you can't get even a "Times," much less an "Athenæum." We comfort ourselves by taking a box at the opera (a whole box on the grand tier, mind) for two shillings and eightpence, English. Also, every evening at half-past eight, Robert and I are sitting under the moon in the great piazza of St. Mark, taking excellent coffee and reading the French papers.

If it were possible to draw more largely on Mrs. Browning's correspondence for this year, it would certainly supply the record of her intimacy, and that of her husband, with Margaret Fuller Ossoli. A warm attachment sprang up between them during that lady's residence in Florence. Its last evenings were all spent at their house; and, soon after she had bidden them farewell, she availed herself of a two days' delay in the departure of the ship to return from Leghorn and be with them one evening more. She had what seemed a prophetic dread of the voyage to America, though she attached no superstitious importance to the prediction once made to her husband that he would be drowned; and learned when it was too late to change her plans that her presence there was, after all, unnecessary. Mr. Browning was deeply affected by the news of her death by shipwreck, which took place on July 16, 1850; and wrote an account of his acquaintance with her, for publication by her friends. This also, unfortunately, was lost. Her son was of the same age as his, little

more than a year old; but she left a token of the friendship which might some day have united them, in a small Bible inscribed to the baby Robert, "In memory of Angelo Ossoli."

The intended journey to England was delayed for Mr. Browning by the painful associations connected with his mother's death; but in the summer of 1851 he found courage to go there: and then, as on each succeeding visit paid to London with his wife, he commemorated his marriage in a manner all his own. He went to the church in which it had been solemnized, and kissed the paving-stones in front of the door. It needed all this love to comfort Mrs. Browning in the estrangement from her father which was henceforth to be accepted as final. He had held no communication with her since her marriage, and she knew that it was not forgiven; but she had cherished a hope that he would so far relent towards her as to kiss her child, even if he would not see her. Her prayer to this effect remained, however, unanswered.

In the autumn they proceeded to Paris;

whence Mrs. Browning wrote, October 22 and November 12.

138 Avenue des Champs Elysées.

. . . It was a long time before we could settle ourselves in a private apartment. . . . At last we came off to these Champs Elysées, to a very pleasant apartment, the window looking over a large terrace (almost large enough to serve the purpose of a garden) to the great drive and promenade of the Parisians when they come out of the streets to sun and shade and show themselves off among the trees. A pretty little dining-room, a writing and dressing room for Robert beside it, a drawing-room beyond that, with two excellent bedrooms, and third bedroom for a "femme de ménage," kitchen, etc. . . . So this answers all requirements, and the sun suns us loyally as in duty bound considering the southern aspect, and we are glad to find ourselves settled for six months. We have had lovely weather, and have seen a fire only yesterday for the first time since we left England. . . . We have

seen nothing in Paris, except the shell of it. Yet, two evenings ago, we hazarded going to a reception at Lady Elgin's, in the Faubourg St. Germain, and saw some French, but nobody of distinction.

It is a good house, I believe, and she has an earnest face which must mean something. We were invited to go every Monday between eight and twelve. We go on Friday to Madame Mohl's, where we are to have some of the "célébrités." . . . Carlyle, for instance, I liked infinitely more in his personality than I expected to like him, and I saw a great deal of him, for he traveled with us to Paris, and spent several evenings with us, we three together. He is one of the most interesting men I could imagine, even deeply interesting to me; and you come to understand perfectly when you know him, that his bitterness is only melancholy, and his scorn, sensibility. Highly picturesque, too, he is in conversation; the talk of writing men is very seldom so good.

And, do you know, I was much taken, in London, with a young authoress, Geraldine

Jewsbury. You have read her books. . . . She herself is quiet and simple, and drew my heart out of me a good deal. I felt inclined to love her in our half-hour's intercourse. . . .

138 Avenue des Champs Elysées (*November* 12).

. . . Robert's father and sister have been paying us a visit during the last three weeks. They are very affectionate to me, and I love them for his sake and their own, and am very sorry at the thought of losing them, as we are on the point of doing. We hope, however, to establish them in Paris, if we can stay, and if no other obstacle should arise before the spring, when they must leave Hatcham. Little Wiedemann *draws*, as you may suppose . . . he is adored by his grandfather, and then, Robert! They are an affectionate family, and not easy when removed one from another. . . .

On their journey from London to Paris, Mr. and Mrs. Browning had been joined by Carlyle; and it afterwards struck Mr. Brown-

ing as strange that, in the "Life" of Carlyle, their companionship on this occasion should be spoken of as the result of a chance meeting. Carlyle not only went to Paris with the Brownings, but had begged permission to do so; and Mrs. Browning had hesitated to grant this because she was afraid her little boy would be tiresome to him. Her fear, however, proved mistaken. The child's prattle amused the philosopher, and led him on one occasion to say: "Why, sir, you have as many aspirations as Napoleon!" At Paris he would have been miserable without Mr. Browning's help, in his ignorance of the language, and impatience of the discomforts which this created for him. He could n't ask for anything, he complained, but they brought him the opposite.

On one occasion Mr. Carlyle made a singular remark. He was walking with Mr. Browning, either in Paris or the neighboring country, when they passed an image of the Crucifixion; and glancing towards the figure of Christ, he said, with his deliberate Scotch

utterance: "Ah, poor fellow, *your* part is played out!"

Two especially interesting letters are dated from the same address, February 15 and April 7, 1852.

. . . "Béranger lives close to us, and Robert has seen him in his white hat, wandering along the asphalt. I had a notion, somehow, that he was very old, but he is only elderly, not much above sixty (which is the prime of life, nowadays), and he lives quietly and keeps out of scrapes poetical and political, and if Robert and I had a little less modesty we are assured that we should find access to him easy. But we can't make up our minds to go to his door and introduce ourselves as vagrant minstrels, when he may probably not know our names. We could never follow the fashion of certain authors, who send their books about without intimations of their being likely to be acceptable or not, — of which practice poor Tennyson knows too much for his peace. If, indeed, a letter of introduction to Béranger were vouchsafed to us from any

benign quarter, we should both be delighted, but we must wait patiently for the influence of the stars. Meanwhile, we have at last sent our letter [Mazzini's] to George Sand, accompanied with a little note signed by both of us, though written by me, as seemed right, being the woman. We half despaired in doing this, for it is most difficult, it appears, to get at her, she having taken vows against seeing strangers in consequence of various annoyances and persecutions, in and out of print, which it's the mere instinct of a woman to avoid — I can understand it perfectly. Also, she is in Paris for only a few days, and under a new name, to escape from the plague of her notoriety. People said, 'She will never see you; you have no chance, I am afraid.' But we determined to try. At least I pricked Robert up to the leap — for he was really inclined to sit in his chair and be proud a little. 'No,' said I, 'you *sha'n't* be proud, and I *won't* be proud, and we *will* see her. I won't die, if I can help it, without seeing George Sand.' So we gave our letter to a friend, who was to give

it to a friend who was to place it in her hands — her abode being a mystery, and the name she used unknown. The next day came by the post this answer : —

Madame, j'aurai l'honneur de vous recevoir Dimanche prochain, rue Racine, 3. C'est le seul jour que je puisse passer chez moi ; et encore je n'en suis pas absolument certaine — mais je ferai tellement mon possible, que ma bonne étoile m'y aidera peut-être un peu. Agréez mille remerciments de cœur ainsi que Monsieur Browning, que j'espère voir avec vous, pour la sympathie que vous m'accordez.

GEORGE SAND.

Paris, 12 *fevrier*, 1852.

" This is graceful and kind, is it not? — and we are going to-morrow — I, rather at the risk of my life, but I shall roll myself up head and all in a thick shawl, and we shall go in a close carriage, and I hope I shall be able to tell you the result before shutting up this letter.

"*Monday.* — I have seen G. S. She received us in a room with a bed in it, the only room she has to occupy, I suppose, during her short stay in Paris. She received us very cordially with her hand held out, which I, in the emotion of the moment, stooped and kissed — upon which she exclaimed, 'Mais non! je ne veux pas,' and kissed me. I don't think she is a great deal taller than I am — yes, taller, but not a great deal — and a little over-stout for that height. The upper part of the face is fine, the forehead, eyebrows, and eyes — dark glowing eyes as they should be; the lower part not so good. The beautiful teeth project a little, flashing out the smile of the large, characteristic mouth, and the chin recedes. It never could have been a beautiful face Robert and I agree, but noble and expressive it has been and is. The complexion is olive, quite without color; the hair, black and glossy, divided with evident care and twisted back into a knot behind the head, and she wore no covering to it. Some of the portraits represent her in ringlets, and

ringlets would be much more becoming to the style of face, I fancy, for the cheeks are rather over-full. She was dressed in a sort of woolen gray gown, with a jacket of the same material (according to the ruling fashion), the gown fastened up to the throat, with a small linen collarette, and plain white muslin sleeves buttoned round the wrists. The hands offered to me were small and well-shaped. Her manners were quite as simple as her costume. I never saw a simpler woman. Not a shade of affectation or consciousness, even — not a suffusion of coquetry, not a cigarette to be seen! Two or three young men were sitting with her, and I observed the profound respect with which they listened to every word she said. She spoke rapidly, with a low, unemphatic voice. Repose of manner is much more her characteristic than animation is — only, under all the quietness, and perhaps by means of it, you are aware of an intense burning soul. She kissed me again when we went away. . . .

"*April* 7. — George Sand we came to

know a great deal more of. I think Robert saw her six times. Once he met her near the Tuileries, offered her his arm, and walked with her the whole length of the gardens. She was not on that occasion looking as well as usual, being a little too much *endimanchée* in terrestrial lavenders and super-celestial blues — not, in fact, dressed with the remarkable taste which he has seen in her at other times. Her usual costume is both pretty and quiet, and the fashionable waistcoat and jacket (which are aspectable (?) in all the 'Ladies' Companions' of the day) make the only approach to masculine wearings to be observed in her.

"She has great nicety and refinement in her personal ways, I think — and the cigarette is really a feminine weapon if properly understood.

"Ah! but I did n't see her smoke. I was unfortunate. I could only go with Robert three times to her house, and once she was out. He was really very good and kind to let me go at all after he found the sort of so-

ciety rampant around her. He did n't like it extremely, but being the prince of husbands, he was lenient to my desires, and yielded the point. She seems to live in the abomination of desolation, as far as regards society — crowds of ill-bred men who adore her, *à genoux bas*, betwixt a puff of smoke and an ejection of saliva, — society of the ragged red, diluted with the low theatrical. She herself so different, so apart, so alone in her melancholy disdain. I was deeply interested in that poor woman. I felt a profound compassion for her. I did not mind much even the Greek, in Greek costume, who *tutoyéd* her, and kissed her I believe, so Robert said — or the other vulgar man of the theatre, who went down on his knees and called her '*sublime*.' '*Caprice d'amitié*,' said she with her quiet, gentle scorn. A noble woman under the mud, be certain. *I* would kneel down to her, too, if she would leave it all, throw it off, and be herself as God made her. But she would not care for my kneeling — she does not care for me. Perhaps she does

not care much for anybody by this time, who knows? She wrote one or two or three kind notes to me, and promised to *venir m'embrasser* before she left Paris, but she did not come. We both tried hard to please her, and she told a friend of ours that she 'liked us.' Only we always felt that we could n't penetrate — could n't really *touch* her — it was all vain.

"Alfred de Musset was to have been at M. Buloz's where Robert was a week ago, on purpose to meet him, but he was prevented in some way. His brother, Paul de Musset, a very different person, was there instead, but we hope to have Alfred on another occasion. Do you know his poems? He is not capable of large grasps, but he has poet's life and blood in him, I assure you. . . . We are expecting a visit from Lamartine, who does a great deal of honor to both of us in the way of appreciation, and was kind enough to propose to come. I will tell you all about it."

Mr. Browning fully shared his wife's impression of a want of frank cordiality on

George Sand's part; and was especially struck by it in reference to himself, with whom it seemed more natural that she should feel at ease. He could only imagine that his studied courtesy towards her was felt by her as a rebuke to the latitude which she granted to other men.

Another eminent French writer whom he much wished to know was Victor Hugo, and I am told that for years he carried about him a letter of introduction from Lord Houghton, always hoping for an opportunity of presenting it. The hope was not fulfilled, though, in 1866, Mr. Browning crossed to Saint Malo by the Channel Islands and spent three days in Jersey.

CHAPTER XI.

1852-1855.

M. Joseph Milsand. — His close Friendship with Mr. Browning ; Mrs. Browning's Impression of him. — New Edition of Mr. Browning's Poems. — "Christmas Eve and Easter Day." — "Essay" on Shelley. — Summer in London. Dante Gabriel Rossetti. — Florence ; secluded Life. — Letters from Mr. and Mrs. Browning. — "Colombe's Birthday." — Baths of Lucca. — Mrs. Browning's Letters. — Winter in Rome. — Mr. and Mrs. Story. — Mrs. Sartoris. — Mrs. Fanny Kemble. — Summer in London. — Tennyson. — Ruskin.

It was during this winter in Paris that Mr. Browning became acquainted with M. Joseph Milsand, the second Frenchman with whom he was to be united by ties of deep friendship and affection. M. Milsand was at that time, and for long afterwards, a frequent contributor to the "Revue des Deux Mondes;" his range of subjects being enlarged by his, for a Frenchman, exceptional knowledge of

English life, language, and literature. He wrote an article on Quakerism, which was much approved by Mr. William Forster, and a little volume on Ruskin called "L'Esthétique Anglaise," which was published in the "Bibliothèque de Philosophie Contemporaine."[1] Shortly before the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Browning in Paris, he had accidentally seen an extract from "Paracelsus." This struck him so much that he procured the two volumes of the works and "Christmas Eve," and discussed the whole in the "Revue" as the second part of an essay entitled "La Poésie Anglaise depuis Byron." Mr. Browning saw the article, and was naturally touched at finding his poems the object of serious study in a foreign country, while still so little regarded in his own. It was no less natural that this should lead to a friendship which, the opening once given, would have grown up unassisted, at least on Mr. Brown-

[1] He published also an admirable little work on the requirements of secondary education in France, equally applicable in many respects to any country and to any time.

ing's side; for M. Milsand united the qualities of a critical intellect with a tenderness, a loyalty, and a simplicity of nature seldom found in combination with them.

The introduction was brought about by the daughter of William Browning, Mrs. Jebb-Dyke, or more directly by Mr. and Mrs. Fraser Corkran, who were among the earliest friends of the Browning family in Paris. M. Milsand was soon an *habitué* of Mr. Browning's house, as somewhat later of that of his father and sister; and when, many years afterwards, Miss Browning had taken up her abode in England, he spent some weeks of the early summer in Warwick Crescent, whenever his home duties or personal occupations allowed him to do so. Several times also the poet and his sister joined him at Saint-Aubin, the seaside village in Normandy which was his special resort, and where they enjoyed the good offices of Madame Milsand, a home-staying, genuine French wife and mother, well acquainted with the resources of its very primitive life. M. Milsand died, in 1886, of apo-

plexy, the consequence, I believe, of heart-disease brought on by excessive cold-bathing. The first reprint of "Sordello," in 1863, had been, as is well known, dedicated to him. The "Parleyings," published within a year of his death, were inscribed to his memory. Mr. Browning's affection for him finds utterance in a few strong words which I shall have occasion to quote. An undated fragment concerning him from Mrs. Browning to her sister-in-law points to a later date than the present, but may as well be inserted here.

. . . "I quite love M. Milsand for being interested in Penini. What a perfect creature he is, to be sure! He always stands in the top place among our gods. Give him my cordial regards, always, mind. . . . He wants, I think — the only want of that noble nature — the sense of spiritual relation; and also he puts under his feet too much the worth of impulse and passion, in considering the powers of human nature. For the rest, I don't know such a man. He has intellectual conscience — or say — the conscience of the intellect, in

a higher degree than I ever saw in any man of any country — and this is no less Robert's belief than mine. When we hear the brilliant talkers and noisy thinkers here and there and everywhere, we go back to Milsand with a real reverence. Also, I never shall forget his delicacy to me personally, nor his tenderness of heart about my child." . . .

The criticism was inevitable from the point of view of Mrs. Browning's nature and experience; but I think she would have revoked part of it if she had known M. Milsand in later years. He would never have agreed with her as to the authority of "impulse and passion," but I am sure he did not underrate their importance as factors in human life.

M. Milsand was one of the few readers of Browning with whom I have talked about him, who had studied his work from the beginning, and had realized the ambition of his first imaginative flights. He was more perplexed by the poet's utterance in later years. "Quel homme extraordinaire!" he once said to me; "son centre n'est pas au milieu." The usual

criticism would have been that, while his own centre was in the middle, he did not seek it in the middle for the things of which he wrote; but I remember that, at the moment in which the words were spoken, they impressed me as full of penetration. Mr. Browning had so much confidence in M. Milsand's linguistic powers that he invariably sent him his proof-sheets for final revision, and was exceedingly pleased with such few corrections as his friend was able to suggest.

With the name of Milsand connects itself in the poet's life that of a younger, but very genuine friend of both, M. Gustave Dourlans: a man of fine critical and intellectual powers, unfortunately neutralized by bad health. M. Dourlans also became a visitor at Warwick Crescent, and a frequent correspondent of Mr. or rather of Miss Browning. He came from Paris once more, to witness the last sad scene in Westminster Abbey.

The first three years of Mr. Browning's married life had been unproductive from a literary point of view. The realization and en-

joyment of the new companionship, the duties as well as interests of the dual existence, and, lastly, the shock and pain of his mother's death, had absorbed his mental energies for the time being. But by the close of 1848 he had prepared for publication in the following year a new edition of "Paracelsus" and the "Bells and Pomegranates" poems. The reprint was in two volumes, and the publishers were Messrs. Chapman and Hall; the system, maintained through Mr. Moxon, of publication at the author's expense, being abandoned by Mr. Browning when he left home. Mrs. Browning writes of him on this occasion that he is paying "peculiar attention to the objections made against certain obscurities." He himself prefaced the edition by these words: "Many of these pieces were out of print, the rest had been withdrawn from circulation, when the corrected edition, now submitted to the reader, was prepared. The various Poems and Dramas have received the author's most careful revision. December, 1848."

In 1850, in Florence, he wrote "Christmas

Eve and Easter Day;" and in December, 1851, in Paris, the Essay on Shelley, to be prefixed to twenty-five supposed letters of that poet, published by Moxon in 1852.[1]

The reading of this Essay might serve to correct the frequent misapprehension of Mr. Browning's religious views which has been based on the literal evidence of "Christmas Eve," were it not that its companion poem has failed to do so; though the tendency of "Easter Day" is as different from that of its precursor as their common Christianity admits. The balance of argument in "Christmas Eve" is in favor of direct revelation of religious truth and prosaic certainty regarding it; while the "Easter Day" vision makes a tentative and unresting attitude the first condition of the religious life; and if Mr. Browning has meant to say — as he so often did say — that religious certainties are required for the undeveloped mind, but that the growing religious intelligence walks best by a receding light, he

[1] They were discovered, not long afterwards, to be spurious, and the book suppressed.

denies the positive basis of Christian belief, and is no more orthodox in the one set of reflections than in the other. The spirit, however, of both poems is ascetic: for the first divorces religious worship from every appeal to the poetic sense; the second refuses to recognize, in poetry or art, or the attainments of the intellect, or even in the best human love, any practical correspondence with religion. The dissertation on Shelley is, what "Sordello" was, what its author's treatment of poets and poetry always must be — an indirect vindication of the conceptions of human life which "Christmas Eve and Easter Day" condemns. This double poem stands indeed so much alone in Mr. Browning's work that we are tempted to ask ourselves to what circumstance or impulse, external or internal, it has been due; and we can only conjecture that the prolonged communion with a mind so spiritual as that of his wife, the special sympathies and differences which were elicited by it, may have quickened his religious imagination, while directing it towards doctrinal or contro-

versial issues which it had not previously embraced.

The Essay is a tribute to the genius of Shelley; it is also a justification of his life and character, as the balance of evidence then presented them to Mr. Browning's mind. It rests on a definition of the respective qualities of the objective and the subjective poet. . . . While both, he says, are gifted with the fuller perception of nature and man, the one endeavors to "reproduce things external (whether the phenomena of the scenic universe, or the manifested action of the human heart and brain) with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow-men, assumed capable of receiving and profiting by this reproduction;" the other "is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below, as to the One above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth, — an ultimate view ever aspired to, if but partially attained, by the poet's own soul. Not what man sees, but what God sees

— the 'Ideas' of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand — it is toward these that he struggles. Not with the combination of humanity in action, but with the primal elements of humanity he has to do; and he digs where he stands, — preferring to seek them in his own soul as the nearest reflex of that absolute Mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak."

The objective poet is therefore a fashioner, the subjective is best described as a seer. The distinction repeats itself in the interest with which we study their respective lives. We are glad of the biography of the objective poet because it reveals to us the power by which he works; we desire still more that of the subjective poet, because it presents us with another aspect of the work itself. The poetry of such a one is an effluence much more than a production; it is "the very radiance and aroma of his personality, projected from it but not separated. Therefore, in our approach to the poetry, we necessarily approach the personality

of the poet; in apprehending it we apprehend him, and certainly we cannot love it without loving him."

The reason of Mr. Browning's prolonged and instinctive reverence for Shelley is thus set forth in the opening pages of the Essay: he recognized in his writings the quality of a "subjective" poet; hence, as he understands the word, the evidence of a divinely inspired man.

Mr. Browning goes on to say that we need the recorded life in order quite to determine to which class of inspiration a given work belongs; and though he regards the work of Shelley as carrying its warrant within itself, his position leaves ample room for a withdrawal of faith, a reversal of judgment, if the ascertained facts of the poet's life should at any future time bear decided witness against him. He is also careful to avoid drawing too hard and fast a line between the two opposite kinds of poet. He admits that a pure instance of either is seldom to be found; he sees no reason why "these two modes of poetic fac-

ulty may not issue hereafter from the same poet in successive perfect works. . . . A mere running-in of the one faculty upon the other" being, meanwhile, "the ordinary circumstance."

I venture, however, to think, that in his various and necessary concessions, he lets slip the main point; and for the simple reason that it is untenable. The terms *subjective* and *objective* denote a real and very important difference on the ground of judgment, but one which tends more and more to efface itself in the sphere of the higher creative imagination. Mr. Browning might as briefly, and I think more fully, have expressed the salient quality of his poet, even while he could describe it in these emphatic words: —

"I pass at once, therefore, from Shelley's minor excellences to his noblest and predominating characteristic.

"This I call his simultaneous perception of Power and Love in the absolute, and of Beauty and Good in the concrete, while he throws, from his poet's station between both,

swifter, subtler, and more numerous films for the connection of each with each, than have been thrown by any modern artificer of whom I have knowledge. . . . I would rather consider Shelley's poetry as a sublime fragmentary essay towards a presentment of the correspondency of the universe to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual, and of the actual to the ideal than" . . .

This essay has, in common with the poems of the preceding years, the one quality of a largely religious, and, in a certain sense, Christian spirit, and in this respect it falls naturally into the general series of its author's works. The assertion of Platonic ideas suggests, however, a mood of spiritual thought for which the reference in "Pauline" has been our only, and a scarcely sufficient preparation; nor could the most definite theism to be extracted from Platonic beliefs ever satisfy the human aspirations which, in a nature like that of Robert Browning, culminate in the idea of God. The metaphysical aspect of the poet's genius here distinctly reappears for

the first time since "Sordello," and also for the last. It becomes merged in the simpler forms of the religious imagination.

The justification of the man Shelley, to which great part of the Essay is devoted, contains little that would seem new to his more recent apologists; little also which to the writer's later judgments continued to recommend itself as true. It was as a great poetic artist, not as a great poet, that the author of "Prometheus" and "The Cenci," of "Julian and Maddalo," and "Epipsychidion" was finally to rank in Mr. Browning's mind. The whole remains, nevertheless, a memorial of a very touching affection; and whatever intrinsic value the Essay may possess, its main interest must always be biographical. Its motive and inspiration are set forth in the closing lines: —

"It is because I have long held these opinions in assurance and gratitude, that I catch at the opportunity offered to me of expressing them here; knowing that the alacrity to fulfill an humble office conveys more love than the

acceptance of the honor of a higher one, and that better, therefore, than the signal service it was the dream of my boyhood to render to his fame and memory, may be the saying of a few, inadequate words upon these scarcely more important supplementary letters of SHELLEY."

If Mr. Browning had seen reason to doubt the genuineness of the letters in question, his Introduction could not have been written. That, while receiving them as genuine, he thought them unimportant, gave it, as he justly discerned, its full significance.

Mr. and Mrs. Browning returned to London for the summer of 1852, and we have a glimpse of them there in a letter from Mr. Fox to his daughter.

July 16 [1852].

. . . I had a charming hour with the Brownings yesterday; more fascinated with her than ever. She talked lots of George Sand, and so beautifully. Moreover she silver electroplated Louis Napoleon ! ! They are lodging at 58 Welbeck Street; the house has

a queer name on the door, and belongs to some Belgian family.

They came in late one night, and R. B. says that in the morning twilight he saw three portraits on the bedroom wall, and speculated who they might be. Light gradually showed the first, Beatrice Cenci. "Good!" said he; "in a poetic region." More light: the second, Lord Byron! Who can the third be? And what think you it was, but your sketch (engraved chalk portrait) of me? He made quite a poem and picture of the affair.

She seems much better; did not put her hand before her mouth, which I took as a compliment: and the young Florentine was gracious.

It need hardly be said that this valued friend was one of the first whom Mr. Browning introduced to his wife, and that she responded with ready warmth to his claims on her gratitude and regard. More than one joint letter from herself and her husband commemorates this new phase of the inti-

macy; one especially interesting was written from Florence in 1858, in answer to the announcement by Mr. Fox of his election for Oldham; and Mr. Browning's contribution, which is very characteristic, will appear in due course.

Either this or the preceding summer brought Mr. Browning for the first time into personal contact with an early lover of his works, Mr. D. G. Rossetti. They had exchanged letters a year or two before, on the subject of "Pauline," which Rossetti (as I have already mentioned) had read in ignorance of its origin, but with the conviction that only the author of "Paracelsus" could have produced it. He wrote to Mr. Browning to ascertain the fact, and to tell him he had admired the poem so much as to transcribe it whole from the British Museum copy. He now called on him with Mr. William Allingham; and doubly recommended himself to the poet's interest by telling him that he was a painter. When Mr. Browning was again in London, in 1855, Rossetti began painting his

portrait, which he finished in Paris in the ensuing winter.

The winter of 1852–53 saw the family once more in Florence, and at Casa Guidi, where the routine of quiet days was resumed. Mrs. Browning has spoken in more than one of her letters of the comparative social seclusion in which she and her husband had elected to live. This seclusion was much modified in later years, and many well-known English and American names become associated with their daily life. It referred indeed almost entirely to their residence in Florence, where they found less inducement to enter into society than in London, Paris, and Rome. But it is on record that during the fifteen years of his married life, Mr. Browning never dined away from home, except on one occasion — an exception proving the rule; and we cannot therefore be surprised that he should subsequently have carried into the experience of an unshackled and very interesting social intercourse, a kind of freshness which a man of fifty has not generally preserved.

The one excitement which presented itself in the early months of 1853 was the production of "Colombe's Birthday." The first allusion to this comes to us in a letter from the poet to Lady, then Mrs. Theodore Martin, from which I quote a few passages: —

FLORENCE, *January* 31, 1853.

MY DEAR MRS. MARTIN, — . . . be assured that I, for my part, have been in no danger of forgetting my promises any more than your performances — which were admirable of all kinds. I shall be delighted if you can do anything for "Colombe." Do what you think best with it, and for me — it will be pleasant to be in such hands — only, pray follow the corrections in the last edition (Chapman and Hall will give you a copy), as they are important to the sense. As for the condensation into three acts, I shall leave that, and all cuttings and the like, to your own judgment; and, come what will, I shall have to be grateful to you, as before. For the rest, you will play the part to heart's content, I *know*. . . .

And how good it will be to see you again, and make my wife see you too — she who "never saw a great actress," she says, unless it was Déjazet! . . .

Mrs. Browning writes about the performance April 12th: —

. . . "I am beginning to be anxious about 'Colombe's Birthday.' I care much more about it than Robert does. He says that no one will mistake it for his speculation; it 's Mr. Buckstone's affair altogether. True — but I should like it to succeed, being Robert's play, notwithstanding. But the play is subtle and refined for pits and galleries. I am nervous about it. On the other hand, those theatrical people ought to know — and what in the world made them select it if it is not likely to answer their purpose? By the way, a dreadful rumor reaches us of its having been 'prepared for the stage by the author.' Don't believe a word of it. Robert just said 'yes' when they wrote to ask him, and not a line of communication has passed since. He has pre-

pared nothing at all, suggested nothing, modified nothing. He referred them to his new edition, and that was the whole." . . .

She communicates the result in May: —

. . . "Yes, Robert's play succeeded, but there could be no 'run' for a play of that kind. It was a *succès d'estime*, and something more, which is surprising, perhaps, considering the miserable acting of the men. Miss Faucit was alone in doing us justice." . . .

Mrs. Browning did see Miss Faucit on her next visit to England. She agreeably surprised that lady by presenting herself alone one morning at her house, and remaining with her for an hour and a half. The only person who had "done justice" to "Colombe," besides contributing to whatever success her husband's earlier plays had obtained, was much more than "a great actress" to Mrs. Browning's mind; and we may imagine it would have gone hard with her before she renounced the pleasure of making her acquaintance.

Two letters, dated from the Baths of Lucca, July 15 and August 20, 1853, tell how and where the ensuing summer was passed, besides introducing us, for the first time, to Mr. and Mrs. William Story, between whose family and that of Mr. Browning so friendly an intimacy was ever afterwards to subsist.

July 15.

. . . We have taken a villa at the Baths of Lucca after a little holy fear of the company there — but the scenery and the coolness and convenience altogether prevail, and we have taken our villa for three months or rather more, and go to it next week with a stiff resolve of not calling nor being called upon. You remember, perhaps, that we were there four years ago, just after the birth of our child. The mountains are wonderful in beauty, and we mean to buy our holiday by doing some work.

Oh, yes! I confess to loving Florence, and to having associated with it the idea of home. . . .

CASA TOLOMEI, ALTA VILLA, BAGNI DI LUCCA,
August 20.

. . . We are enjoying the mountains here, riding the donkeys in the footsteps of the sheep, and eating strawberries and milk by basinsful. The strawberries succeed one another throughout the summer, through growing on different aspects of the hills. If a tree is felled in the forests, strawberries spring up just as mushrooms might, and the peasants sell them for just nothing. . . . Then our friends Mr. and Mrs. Story help the mountains to please us a good deal. He is the son of Judge Story, the biographer of his father, and, for himself, sculptor and poet — and she a sympathetic, graceful woman, fresh and innocent in face and thought. We go backwards and forwards to tea, and talk at one another's houses.

. . . Since I began this letter we have had a grand donkey excursion to a village called Benabbia, and the cross above it on the mountain-peak. We returned in the dark, and were in some danger of tumbling down vari-

ous precipices — but the scenery was exquisite — past speaking of for beauty. Oh, those jagged mountains, rolled together like pre-Adamite beasts, and setting their teeth against the sky — it was wonderful. . . .

Mr. Browning's share of the work referred to was "In a Balcony;" also, probably, some of the "Men and Women;" the scene of the declaration in "By the Fireside" was laid in a little adjacent mountain gorge to which he walked or rode. A fortnight's visit from Mr., now Lord Lytton, was also an incident of this summer.

The next three letters from which I am able to quote describe the impressions of Mrs. Browning's first winter in Rome.

ROME, 43 Via Bocca di Leone,
3° piano, *January* 18, 1854.

. . . Well, we are all well to begin with, and have been well — our troubles came to us through sympathy entirely. A most exquisite journey of eight days we had from Florence to Rome, seeing the great monastery

and triple church of Assisi and the wonderful Terni by the way — that passion of the waters which makes the human heart seem so still. In the highest spirits we entered Rome, Robert and Penini singing actually — for the child was radiant and flushed with the continual change of air and scene. . . . You remember my telling you of our friends the Storys — how they and their two children helped to make the summer go pleasantly at the Baths of Lucca. They had taken an apartment for us in Rome, so that we arrived in comfort to lighted fires and lamps as if coming home, — and we had a glimpse of their smiling faces that evening. In the morning before breakfast, little Edith was brought over to us by the manservant with a message, "the boy was in convulsions — there was danger." We hurried to the house, of course, leaving Edith with Wilson. Too true! All that first day we spent beside a death-bed; for the child never rallied, never opened his eyes in consciousness, and by eight in the evening he was gone. In the mean while, Edith was taken

ill at our house — could not be moved, said the physicians . . . gastric fever, with a tendency to the brain — and within two days her life was almost despaired of — exactly the same malady as her brother's. . . . Also the English nurse was apparently dying at the Storys' house, and Emma Page, the artist's youngest daughter, sickened with the same disease.

. . . To pass over the dreary time, I will tell you at once that the three patients recovered — only in poor little Edith's case Roman fever followed the gastric, and has persisted ever since in periodical recurrence. She is very pale and thin. Roman fever is not dangerous to life, but it is exhausting. . . . Now you will understand what ghostly flakes of death have changed the sense of Rome to me. The first day by a death-bed, the first drive out, to the cemetery, where poor little Joe is laid close to Shelley's heart ("Cor cordium," says the epitaph), and where the mother insisted on going when she and I went out in the carriage together. I am horribly weak

about such things; I can't look on the earth-side of death; I flinch from corpses and graves, and never meet a common funeral without a sort of horror. When I look deathwards I look *over* death, and upwards, or I can't look that way at all. So that it was a struggle with me to sit upright in that carriage in which the poor stricken mother sat so calmly — not to drop from the seat. Well, all this has blackened Rome to me. I can't think about the Cæsars in the old strain of thought; the antique words get muddled and blurred with warm dashes of modern, every-day tears and fresh grave-clay. Rome is spoilt to me, — there 's the truth. Still, one lives through one's associations when not too strong, and I have arrived at almost enjoying some things — the climate, for instance, which, though pernicious to the general health, agrees particularly with me, and the sight of the blue sky floating like a sea-tide through the great gaps and rifts of ruins. . . . We are very comfortably settled in rooms turned to the sun, and do work and play by

turns, having almost too many visitors, hear excellent music at Mrs. Sartoris's (A. K.) once or twice a week, and have Fanny Kemble to come and talk to us with the doors shut, we three together. This is pleasant. I like her decidedly.

If anybody wants small talk by handfuls, of glittering dust swept out of *salons*, here 's Mr. Thackeray besides! . . .

ROME, *March* 29.

. . . We see a good deal of the Kembles here, and like them both, especially Fanny, who is looking magnificent still, with her black hair and radiant smile. A very noble creature indeed. Somewhat unelastic, unpliant to the age, attached to the old modes of thought and convention — but noble in qualities and defects. I like her much. She thinks me credulous and full of dreams — but does not despise me for that reason, — which is good and tolerant of her, and pleasant too, for I should not be quite easy under her contempt. Mrs. Sartoris is genial and gen-

erous — her milk has had time to stand to cream in her happy family relations, which poor Fanny Kemble's has not had. Mrs. Sartoris's house has the best society in Rome — and exquisite music of course. We met Lockhart there, and my husband sees a good deal of him — more than I do — because of the access of cold weather lately which has kept me at home chiefly. Robert went down to the seaside, on a day's excursion with him and the Sartorises — and I hear found favor in his sight. Said the critic, "I like Browning — he is n't at all like a damned literary man." That's a compliment, I believe, according to your dictionary. It made me laugh and think of you directly. . . . Robert has been sitting for his picture to Mr. Fisher, the English artist who painted Mr. Kenyon and Landor. You remember those pictures in Mr. Kenyon's house in London. Well, he has painted Robert's, and it is an admirable likeness. The expression is an exceptional expression, but highly characteristic. . . .

May 19.

. . . To leave Rome will fill me with barbarian complacency. I don't pretend to have a ray of sentiment about Rome. It's a palimpsest Rome, a watering-place written over the antique, and I have n't taken to it as a poet should, I suppose. And let us speak the truth above all things. I am strongly a creature of association, and the associations of the place have not been personally favorable to me. Among the rest, my child, the light of my eyes, has been more unwell than I ever saw him. . . . The pleasantest days in Rome we have spent with the Kembles, the two sisters, who are charming and excellent both of them, in different ways, and certainly they have given us some excellent hours in the Campagna, upon picnic excursions — they and certain of their friends; for instance, M. Ampère, the member of the French Institute, who is witty and agreeable, M. Goltz, the Austrian minister, who is an agreeable man, and Mr. Lyons, the son of Sir Edmund, etc. The talk was almost too brilliant for

the sentiment of the scenery, but it harmonized entirely with the mayonnaise and champagne. . . .

It must have been on one of the excursions here described that an incident took place, which Mr. Browning relates with characteristic comments in a letter to Mrs. Fitz-Gerald of July 15, 1882. The picnic party had strolled away to some distant spot. Mrs. Browning was not strong enough to join them, and her husband, as a matter of course, stayed with her; which act of consideration prompted Mrs. Kemble to exclaim that he was the only man she had ever known who behaved like a Christian to his wife. She was, when he wrote this letter, reading his works for the first time, and had expressed admiration for them; but, he continued, none of the kind things she said to him on that subject could move him as did those words in the Campagna. Mrs. Kemble would have modified her statement in later years, for the sake of one English and one American husband now closely

related to her. Even then, perhaps, she did not make it without inward reserve. But she will forgive me I am sure for having repeated it.

Mr. Browning also refers to her Memoirs, which he had just read, and says: "I saw her in those [I conclude earlier] days much oftener than is set down, but she scarcely noticed me; though I always liked her extremely."

Another of Mrs. Browning's letters is written from Florence, June 6 (1854): —

. . . "We mean to stay at Florence a week or two longer and then go northward. I love Florence — the place looks exquisitely beautiful in its garden ground of vineyards and olive-trees, sung round by the nightingales day and night. . . . If you take one thing with another, there is no place in the world like Florence, I am persuaded, for a place to live in — cheap, tranquil, cheerful, beautiful, within the limits of civilization yet out of the crush of it. . . . We have spent two delicious evenings at villas outside the

gates, one with young Lytton, Sir Edward's son, of whom I have told you, I think. I like him . . . we both do . . . from the bottom of our hearts. Then, our friend, Frederick Tennyson, the new poet, we are delighted to see again."

. . . . . .

. . . "Mrs. Sartoris has been here on her way to Rome, spending most of her time with us . . . singing passionately and talking eloquently. She is really charming." . . .

I have no record of the northward journey or of the experiences of the winter of 1854–55. In all probability Mr. and Mrs. Browning remained in, or as near as possible to, Florence, since their income was still too limited for continuous traveling. They possibly talked of going to England, but postponed it till the following year; we know that they went there in 1855, taking his sister with them as they passed through Paris. They did not this time take lodgings for the summer months, but hired a house at 13 Dorset Street, Portman Square; and there, on September 27,

Tennyson read his new poem "Maud," to Mrs. Browning, while Rossetti, the only other person present besides the family, privately drew his likeness in pen and ink. The likeness has become well known; the unconscious sitter must also, by this time, be acquainted with it; but Miss Browning thinks no one except herself, who was near Rossetti at the table, was at the moment aware of its being made. All eyes must have been turned towards Tennyson, seated by his hostess on the sofa. Miss Arabel Barrett was also of the party.

Some interesting words of Mrs. Browning's carry their date in the allusion to Mr. Ruskin; but I cannot ascertain it more precisely: —

"We went to Denmark Hill yesterday to have luncheon with them, and see the Turners, which, by the way, are divine. I like Mr. Ruskin much, and so does Robert. Very gentle, yet earnest, — refined and truthful. I like him very much. We count him one among the valuable acquaintances made this year in England."

CHAPTER XII.

1855–1858.

"Men and Women." — "Karshook." — "Two in the Campagna." — Winter in Paris ; Lady Elgin. — "Aurora Leigh." — Death of Mr. Kenyon and Mr. Barrett. — Penini. — Mrs. Browning's Letters to Miss Browning. — The Florentine Carnival. — Baths of Lucca. — Spiritualism. — Mr. Kirkup ; Count Ginnasi. — Letter from Mr. Browning to Mr. Fox. — Havre.

THE beautiful "One Word More" was dated from London in September; and the fifty poems gathered together under the title of "Men and Women" were published before the close of the year, in two volumes, by Messrs. Chapman and Hall.[1] They are all familiar friends to Mr. Browning's readers, in their first arrangement and appearance, as in

[1] The date is given in the edition of 1868 as London, 185– ; in the Tauchnitz selection of 1872, London and Florence, 184– and 185– ; in the new English edition, 184– and 185–.

later redistributions and reprints; but one curious little fact concerning them is perhaps not generally known. In the eighth line of the fourteenth section of "One Word More" they were made to include "Karshook" (Ben Karshook's Wisdom), which never was placed amongst them. It was written in April, 1854; and the dedication of the volume must have been, as it so easily might be, in existence, before the author decided to omit it. The wrong name, once given, was retained, I have no doubt, from preference for its terminal sound; and "Karshook" only became "Karshish" in the Tauchnitz copy of 1872, and in the English edition of 1889.

"Karshook" appeared in 1856 in "The Keepsake," edited by Miss Power; but, as we are told on good authority, has been printed in no edition or selection of the poet's works. I am therefore justified in inserting it here: —

I.

"Would a man 'scape the rod?"
Rabbi Ben Karshook saith, —
"See that he turn to God
The day before his death."

"Ay, could a man inquire
When it shall come!" I say.
The Rabbi's eye shoots fire —
"Then let him turn to-day!"

II.

Quoth a young Sadducee:
"Reader of many rolls,
Is it so certain we
Have, as they tell us, souls?"

"Son, there is no reply!"
The Rabbi bit his beard:
"Certain, a soul have *I* —
We may have none," he sneer'd.

Thus Karshook, the Hiram's-Hammer,
The Right-hand Temple-column,
Taught babes in grace their grammar,
And struck the simple, solemn.

Among this first collection of "Men and Women" was the poem called "Two in the Campagna." It is a vivid, yet enigmatical little study of a restless spirit tantalized by glimpses of repose in love, saddened and perplexed by the manner in which this eludes it. Nothing that should impress one as more purely dramatic ever fell from Mr. Browning's

pen. We are told, nevertheless, in Mr. Sharp's "Life," that a personal character no less actual than that of the "Guardian Angel" has been claimed for it. The writer, with characteristic delicacy, evades all discussion of the question; but he concedes a great deal in his manner of doing so. The poem, he says, conveys a sense of that necessary isolation of the individual soul which resists the fusing power of the deepest love; and its meaning cannot be personally — because it is universally — true. I do not think Mr. Browning meant to emphasize this aspect of the mystery of individual life, though the poem, in a certain sense, expresses it. We have no reason to believe that he ever accepted it as constant; and in no case could he have intended to refer its conditions to himself. He was often isolated by the processes of his mind; but there was in him no barrier to that larger emotional sympathy which we think of as sympathy of the soul. If this poem were true, "One Word More" would be false, quite otherwise than in that approach to exaggeration which is inci-

dental to the poetic form. The true keynote of "Two in the Campagna" is the pain of perpetual change, and of the conscious, though unexplained, predestination to it. Mr. Browning could have still less in common with such a state, since one of the qualities for which he was most conspicuous was the enormous power of anchorage which his affections possessed. Only length of time and variety of experience could fully test this power or fully display it; but the signs of it had not been absent from even his earliest life. He loved fewer people in youth than in advancing age: nature and circumstance combined to widen the range, and vary the character of his human interests; but where once love or friendship had struck a root, only a moral convulsion could avail to dislodge it. I make no deduction from this statement when I admit that the last and most emphatic words of the poem in question, —

"Only I discern —
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn," —

did probably come from the poet's heart, as they also found a deep echo in that of his wife, who much loved them.

From London they returned to Paris for the winter of 1855–56. The younger of the Kemble sisters, Mrs. Sartoris, was also there with her family; and the pleasant meetings of the Campagna renewed themselves for Mr. Browning, though in a different form. He was also, with his sister, a constant visitor at Lady Elgin's. Both they and Mrs. Browning were greatly attached to her, and she warmly reciprocated the feeling. As Mr. Locker's letter has told us, Mr. Browning was in the habit of reading poetry to her, and when his sister had to announce his arrival from Italy or England, she would say: "Robert is coming to nurse you, and read to you." Lady Elgin was by this time almost completely paralyzed. She had lost the power of speech, and could only acknowledge the little attentions which were paid to her by some graceful pathetic gesture of the left hand; but she retained her sensibilities to the last; and Miss

Browning received on one occasion a serious lesson in the risk of ever assuming that the appearance of unconsciousness guarantees its reality. Lady Augusta Bruce had asked her, in her mother's presence, how Mrs. Browning was; and, imagining that Lady Elgin was unable to hear or understand, she had answered with incautious distinctness, "I am afraid she is very ill," when a little sob from the invalid warned her of her mistake. Lady Augusta quickly repaired it by rejoining, "But she is better than she was, is she not?" Miss Browning of course assented.

There were other friends, old and new, whom Mr. Browning occasionally saw, including, I need hardly say, the celebrated Madame Mohl. In the main, however, he led a quiet life, putting aside many inducements to leave his home.

Mrs. Browning was then writing "Aurora Leigh," and her husband must have been more than ever impressed by her power of work, as displayed by her manner of working. To him, as to most creative writers, perfect

quiet was indispensable to literary production. She wrote in pencil, on scraps of paper, as she lay on the sofa in her sitting-room, open to interruption from chance visitors, or from her little omnipresent son; simply hiding the paper beside her if any one came in, and taking it up again when she was free. And if this process was conceivable in the large, comparatively silent spaces of their Italian home, and amidst habits of life which reserved social intercourse for the close of the working day, it baffles belief when one thinks of it as carried on in the conditions of a Parisian winter, and the little *salon* of the apartment in the Rue du Colisée in which those months were spent. The poem was completed in the ensuing summer, in Mr. Kenyon's London house, and dedicated, October 17, in deeply pathetic words, to that faithful friend, whom the writer was never to see again.

The news of his death, which took place in December, 1856, reached Mr. and Mrs. Browning in Florence, to be followed in the spring by that of Mrs. Browning's father. Husband

and wife had both determined to forego any pecuniary benefit which might accrue to them from this event; but they were not called upon to exercise their powers of renunciation. By Mr. Kenyon's will they were the richer, as is now, I think, generally known, the one by six thousand, the other by four thousand guineas.[1] Of that cousin's long kindness Mrs. Browning could scarcely in after-days trust herself to speak. It was difficult to her, she said, even to write his name without tears.

I have alluded, perhaps tardily, to Mr. Browning's son, a sociable little being, who must for some time have been playing a prominent part in his parents' lives. I saw him for the first time in this winter of 1855–56, and remember the grave expression of the little round face, the outline of which was common, at all events in childhood, to all the members of his mother's family, and was conspicuous in her, if we may trust an early portrait which has recently come to light. He wore the curl-

[1] Mr. Kenyon had considerable wealth, derived, like Mr. Barrett's, from West Indian estates.

ing hair to which she refers in a later letter, and pretty frocks and frills, in which she delighted to clothe him. It is on record that, on one of the journeys of this year, a trunk was temporarily lost which contained Peni's embroidered trousers, and the MS., whole or in part, of "Aurora Leigh;" and that Mrs. Browning had scarcely a thought to spare for her poem, in face of the damage to her little boy's appearance which the accident involved.

How he came by his familiar name of Penini — hence Peni, and Pen — neither signifies in itself, nor has much bearing on his father's family history; but I cannot refrain from a word of comment on Mr. Hawthorne's fantastic conjecture, which has been asserted and reasserted in opposition to Mr. Browning's own statement of the case. According to Mr. Hawthorne, the name was derived from Apennino, and bestowed on the child in babyhood, because Apennino was a colossal statue, and he was so very small. It would be strange indeed that any joke connecting "Baby" with a given colossal statue should have found its

way into the family without father, mother, or nurse being aware of it; or that any joke should have been accepted there which implied that the little boy was not of normal size. But the fact is still more unanswerable that Apennino could by no process congenial to the Italian language be converted into Penini. Its inevitable abbreviation would be Pennino, with a distinct separate sounding of the central *n's*, or Nino. The accentuation of Penini is also distinctly German.

During this winter in Paris, little Wiedemann, as his parents tried to call him — his full name was Robert Wiedemann Barrett — had developed a decided turn for blank verse. He would extemporize short poems, singing them to his mother, who wrote them down as he sang. There is no less proof of his having possessed a talent for music, though it first naturally showed itself in the love of a cheerful noise. His father had once sat down to the piano, for a serious study of some piece, when the little boy appeared, with the evident intention of joining in the perform-

ance. Mr. Browning rose precipitately, and was about to leave the room. "Oh!" exclaimed the hurt mother, "you are going away, and he has brought his three drums to accompany you upon." She herself would undoubtedly have endured the mixed melody for a little time, though her husband did not think she seriously wished him to do so. But if he did not play the piano to the accompaniment of Pen's drums, he played piano duets with him as soon as the boy was old enough to take part in them; and devoted himself to his instruction in this, as in other and more important branches of knowledge.

Peni had also his dumb companions, as his father had had before him. Tortoises lived at one end of the famous balcony at Casa Guidi; and when the family were at the Baths of Lucca, Mr. Browning would stow away little snakes in his bosom, and produce them for the child's amusement. As the child grew into a man, the love of animals which he had inherited became conspicuous in him; and it gave rise to many amusing and

some pathetic little episodes of his artist life. The creatures which he gathered about him were generally, I think, more highly organized than those which elicited his father's peculiar tenderness; it was natural that he should exact more pictorial or more companionable qualities from them. But father and son concurred in the fondness for snakes, and in a singular predilection for owls; and they had not been long established in Warwick Crescent, when a bird of that family was domesticated there. We shall hear of it in a letter from Mr. Browning.

Of his son's moral quality as quite a little child his father has told me pretty and very distinctive stories, but they would be out of place here.[1]

[1] I am induced, on second thoughts, to subjoin one of these, for its testimony to the moral atmosphere into which the child had been born. He was sometimes allowed to play with a little boy not of his own class — perhaps the son of a *contadino*. The child was unobjectionable, or neither Penini nor his parents would have endured the association; but the servants once thought themselves justified in treating him cavalierly, and Pen flew indignant to his mother, to

Mrs. Browning seems now to have adopted the plan of writing independent letters to her sister-in-law; and those available for our purpose are especially interesting. The buoyancy of tone which has habitually marked her communications, but which failed during the winter in Rome, reasserts itself in the following extract. Her maternal comments on Peni and his perfections have hitherto been so carefully excluded, that a brief allusion to him may be allowed on the present occasion.

1857.

My dearest Sarianna, . . . Here is Penini's letter, which takes up so much room that I must be sparing of mine — and, by the way, if you consider him improved in his

complain of their behavior. Mrs. Browning at once sought little Alessandro, with kind words and a large piece of cake; but this, in Pen's eyes, only aggravated the offense; it was a direct reflection on his visitor's quality. "He does n't tome for take," he burst forth; "he tomes because he is my friend." How often, since I heard this first, have we repeated the words, "he does n't tome for take," in half-serious definition of a disinterested person or act! They became a standing joke.

writing, give the praise to Robert, who has been taking most patient pains with him indeed. You will see how the little curly head is turned with carnival doings. So gay a carnival never was in our experience, for until last year (when we were absent) all masks had been prohibited, and now everybody has eaten of the tree of good and evil till not an apple is left. Peni persecuted me to let him have a domino — with tears and embraces — he "*almost never* in all his life had had a domino," and he would like it so. Not a black domino! no — he hated black — but a blue domino, trimmed with pink! that was his taste. The pink trimming I coaxed him out of, but for the rest, I let him have his way. . . . For my part, the universal madness reached me sitting by the fire (whence I had not stirred for three months), and you will open your eyes when I tell you that I went (in domino and masked) to the great opera-ball. Yes! I did, really. Robert, who had been invited two or three times to other people's boxes, had proposed to return their kind-

ness by taking a box himself at the opera this night, and entertaining two or three friends with galantine and champagne. Just as he and I were lamenting the impossibility of my going, on that very morning the wind changed, the air grew soft and mild, and he maintained that I might and should go. There was no time to get a domino of my own (Robert himself had a beautiful one made, and I am having it metamorphosed into a black silk gown for myself!), so I sent out and hired one, buying the mask. And very much amused I was. I like to see these characteristic things. (I shall never rest, Sarianna, till I risk my reputation at the *bal de l'opéra* at Paris.) Do you think I was satisfied with staying in the box? No, indeed. Down I went, and Robert and I elbowed our way through the crowd to the remotest corner of the ball below. Somebody smote me on the shoulder and cried "*Bella Mascherina!*" and I answered as impudently as one feels under a mask. At two o'clock in the morning, however, I had to give up and come

away (being overcome by the heavy air) and ingloriously left Robert and our friends to follow at half-past four. Think of the refinement and gentleness — yes, I must call it *superiority* of this people — when no excess, no quarreling, no rudeness nor coarseness can be observed in the course of such wild masked liberty; not a touch of license anywhere, and perfect social equality! Our servant Ferdinando side by side in the same ball-room with the Grand Duke, and no class's delicacy offended against! For the Grand Duke went down into the ball-room for a short time. . . .

The summer of 1857 saw the family once more at the Baths of Lucca, and again in company with Mr. Lytton. He had fallen ill at the house of their common friend, Miss Blagden, also a visitor there; and Mr. Browning shared in the nursing, of which she refused to intrust any part to less friendly hands. He sat up with the invalid for four nights; and would doubtless have done so for as many

more as seemed necessary, but that Mrs. Browning protested against this trifling with his own health.

The only serious difference which ever arose between Mr. Browning and his wife referred to the subject of spiritualism. Mrs. Browning held doctrines which prepared her to accept any real or imagined phenomena betokening intercourse with the spirits of the dead; nor could she be repelled by anything grotesque or trivial in the manner of this intercourse, because it was no part of her belief that a spirit still inhabiting the atmosphere of our earth should exhibit any dignity or solemnity not belonging to him while he lived upon it. The question must have been discussed by them on its general grounds at a very early stage of their intimacy; but it only assumed practical importance when Mr. Home came to Florence in 1857 or 1858. Mr. Browning found himself compelled to witness some of the "manifestations." He was keenly alive to their generally prosaic and irreverent character, and to the appearance of jugglery which

was then involved in them. He absolutely denied the good faith of all the persons concerned. Mrs. Browning as absolutely believed it; and no compromise between them was attainable, because, strangely enough, neither of them admitted as possible that mediums or witnesses should deceive themselves. The personal aspect which the question thus received brought it into closer and more painful contact with their daily life. They might agree to differ as to the abstract merits of spiritualism; but Mr. Browning could not resign himself to his wife's trustful attitude towards some of the individuals who at that moment represented it. He may have had no substantial fear of her doing anything that could place her in their power, though a vague dread of this seems to have haunted him; but he chafed against the public association of her name with theirs. Both his love for and his pride in her resented it.

He had subsided into a more judicial frame of mind when he wrote "Sludge the Medium," in which he says everything which can excuse

the liar, and, what is still more remarkable, modify the lie. So far back as the autumn of 1860, I heard him discuss the trickery which he believed himself to have witnessed, as dispassionately as any other non-credulous person might have done so. The experience must even before that have passed out of the foreground of his conjugal life. He remained, nevertheless, subject, for many years, to gusts of uncontrollable emotion, which would sweep over him whenever the question of "spirits" or "spiritualism" was revived; and we can only understand this in connection with the peculiar circumstances of the case. With all his faith in the future, with all his constancy to the past, the memory of pain was stronger in him than any other. A single discordant note in the harmony of that married love, though merged in its actual existence, would send intolerable vibrations through his remembrance of it. And the pain had not been, in this instance, that of simple disagreement. It was complicated by Mrs. Browning's refusal to admit that disagreement was possible. She

never believed in her husband's disbelief; and he had been not unreasonably annoyed by her always assuming it to be feigned. But his doubt of spiritualistic sincerity was not feigned. She cannot have thought, and scarcely can have meant to say so. She may have meant to say, "You believe that these are tricks, but you know that there is something real behind them;" and so far, if no farther, she may have been in the right. Mr. Browning never denied the abstract possibility of spiritual communication with either living or dead; he only denied that such communication had ever been proved, or that any useful end could be subserved by it. The tremendous potentialities of hypnotism and thought-reading, now passing into the region of science, were not then so remote but that an imagination like his must have foreshadowed them. The natural basis of the seemingly supernatural had not yet entered into discussion. He may, from the first, have suspected the existence of some mysterious force, dangerous because not understood, and for this reason doubly liable to

fall into dangerous hands. And if this was so, he would necessarily regard the whole system of manifestations with an apprehensive hostility, which was not entire negation, but which rebelled against any effort on the part of others, above all of those he loved, to interpret it into assent. The pain and anger which could be aroused in him by an indication on the part of a valued friend of even an impartial interest in the subject points especially to the latter conclusion.

He often gave an instance of the tricks played in the name of spiritualism on credulous persons, which may amuse those who have not yet heard it. I give the story as it survives in the fresher memory of Mr. Val Prinsep, who also received it from Mr. Browning.

"At Florence lived a curious old savant who in his day was well known to all who cared for art or history. I fear now few live who recollect Kirkup. He was quite a mine of information on all kinds of forgotten lore. It was he who discovered Giotto's portrait of

Dante in the Bargello. Speaking of some friend, he said, 'He is a most ignorant fellow! Why, he does not know how to cast a horoscope!' Of him Browning told me the following story. Kirkup was much taken up with spiritualism, in which he firmly believed. One day Browning called on him to borrow a book. He rang loudly at the story, for he knew Kirkup, like Landor, was quite deaf. To his astonishment the door opened at once and Kirkup appeared.

"'Come in,' he cried; 'the spirits told me there was some one at the door. Ah! I know you do not believe! Come and see. Mariana is in a trance!'

"Browning entered. In the middle room, full of all kinds of curious objects of 'vertu,' stood a handsome peasant girl, with her eyes fixed as though she were in a trance.

"'You see, Browning,' said Kirkup, 'she is quite insensible, and has no will of her own. Mariana, hold up your arm.'

"The woman slowly did as she was bid.

"'She cannot take it down till I tell her,' cried Kirkup.

"'Very curious,' observed Browning. 'Meanwhile I have come to ask you to lend me a book.'

"Kirkup, as soon as he was made to hear what book was wanted, said he should be delighted.

"'Wait a bit. It is in the next room.'

"The old man shuffled out at the door. No sooner had he disappeared than the woman turned to Browning, winked, and putting down her arm leaned it on his shoulder. When Kirkup returned she resumed her position and rigid look.

"'Here is the book,' said Kirkup. 'Is n't it wonderful?' he added, pointing to the woman.

"'Wonderful,' agreed Browning as he left the room.

"The woman and her family made a good thing of poor Kirkup's spiritualism."

Something much more remarkable in reference to this subject happened to the poet him-

self during his residence in Florence. It is related in a letter to the "Spectator," dated January 30, 1869, and signed J. S. K.

"Mr. Robert Browning tells me that when he was in Florence some years since, an Italian nobleman (a Count Ginnasi of Ravenna), visiting at Florence, was brought to his house without previous introduction, by an intimate friend. The Count professed to have great mesmeric and clairvoyant faculties, and declared, in reply to Mr. Browning's avowed skepticism, that he would undertake to convince him somehow or other of his powers. He then asked Mr. Browning whether he had anything about him then and there, which he could hand to him, and which was in any way a relic or memento. This Mr. Browning thought was perhaps because he habitually wore no sort of trinket or ornament, not even a watchguard, and might therefore turn out to be a safe challenge. But it so happened that, by a curious accident, he was then wearing under his coat-sleeves some gold wrist-studs which he had quite recently taken into wear,

in the absence (by mistake of a seamstress) of his ordinary wrist-buttons. He had never before worn them in Florence or elsewhere, and had found them in some old drawer where they had lain forgotten for years. One of these studs he took out and handed to the Count, who held it in his hand awhile, looking earnestly in Mr. Browning's face, and then he said, as if much impressed, '*C'è qualche cosa che mi grida nell' orecchio "Uccisione! uccisione!"*' ('There is something here which cries out in my ear, "Murder! murder!"').

"'And truly,' says Mr. Browning, 'those very studs were taken from the dead body of a great-uncle of mine who was violently killed on the estate in St. Kitt's, nearly eighty years ago. . . . The occurrence of my great-uncle's murder was known only to myself of all men in Florence, as certainly was also my possession of the studs.'"

A letter from the poet, of July 21, 1883, affirms that the account is correct in every

particular, adding, "My own explanation of the matter has been that the shrewd Italian felt his way by the involuntary help of my own eyes and face." The story has been reprinted in the Reports of the Psychical Society.

A pleasant piece of news came to brighten the January of 1858. Mr. Fox was returned for Oldham, and at once wrote to announce the fact. He was answered in a joint letter from Mr. and Mrs. Browning, interesting throughout, but of which only the second part is quite suited for present insertion.

Mrs. Browning, who writes first and at most length, ends by saying she must leave a space for Robert, that Mr. Fox may be compensated for reading all she has had to say. The husband continues as follows: —

. . . "A space for Robert," who has taken a breathing space — hardly more than enough — to recover from his delight, he won't say surprise, at your letter, dear Mr. Fox. But it is all right and, like you, I wish from my

heart we could get close together again, as in those old days, and what times we would have here in Italy! The realization of the children's prayer of angels at the corner of your bed (*i. e.* sofa), one to read and one (my wife) to write,[1] and both to guard you through the night of lodging-keeper's extortions, abominable charges for firing, and so on. (Observe, to call one's self "an angel" in this land is rather humble, where they are apt to be painted as plumed cut-throats or celestial police — you say of Gabriel at his best and blithesomest, "Should n't admire meeting *him* in a narrow lane!")

I say this foolishly just because I can't trust myself to be earnest about it. I would, you know, I would, always would, choose you out of the whole English world to judge and correct what I write myself; my wife shall read this and let it stand if I have told her so these twelve years — and certainly I have not grown intellectually an inch over the good and kind

[1] Mr. Fox much liked to be read to, and was in the habit of writing his articles by dictation.

hand you extended over my head how many years ago! Now it goes over my wife's too.

How was it Tottie never came here as she promised? Is it to be some other time? Do think of Florence, if ever you feel chilly, and hear quantities about the Princess Royal's marriage, and want a change. I hate the thought of leaving Italy for one day more than I can help — and satisfy my English predilections by newspapers and a book or two. One gets nothing of that kind here, but the stuff out of which books grow, — it lies about one's feet indeed. Yet for me, there would be one book better than any now to be got here or elsewhere, and all out of a great English head and heart, — those "Memoirs" you engaged to give us. Will you give us them?

Good-by now — if ever the whim strikes you to "make beggars happy," remember us.

Love to Tottie, and love and gratitude to you, dear Mr. Fox,

From yours ever affectionately,

ROBERT BROWNING.

In the summer of this year, the poet with his wife and child joined his father and sister at Havre. It was the last time they were all to be together.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01102 0510

DATE DUE

FEB 0 4 1995

Demco, Inc. 38-293